"Breaking Every Fetter"? To What Extent Has The Black Led Church In Britain Developed A Theology Of Liberation?

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Submitted for the degree of PhD to the University of Warwick in October 1996. Department of Caribbean Studies

Contents

Acknowledgements...

I would like to thank all those who made it possible for me to carry out this research especially Paul, Robert, Emanuel, Mel and Karen.

I am particularly grateful to all of the Pastors who allowed me access into their Churches and organisations: Pastor Corbett, Pastor Anderson, Rev. Williams, Pastor Gray, Pastor Thompson, Bishop Dunn in Britain and Joel Downer, UTCWI staff, Bishop Thompson, Pastor Brooks, in Jamaica. Joel Edwards, Io Smith, Kate Coleman and all who participated in the interviews.

For inspiration and encouragement many thanks to my friends and family.

Dedication...

To Those who live, struggle, worship and survive in the spirit of Maat.

Abbreviations

BLC/BLCs	*Black Led Churches/Black Led Churches*
ACC	*African Caribbean Christianity*
NTCG	*New Testament Church of God*
WHC	*Wesleyan Holiness Church*
SPF	*Shiloh Pentecostal Fellowship*
SDA	*Seventh Day Adventist Church*
FUCJCA	*First United Church of Jesus Christ Apostolic*
ECRJ	*Evangelical Christians for Racial Justice*
ACEA	*African Caribbean Evangelical Alliance*
BLCLC	*Black Led Churches Liaison Committee*
CBWCP	*Centre for Black and White Christian Partnership*
TBC	*Traditional British Church/es*

Synopsis

The last half of the twentieth century has seen the development of several significant Christian theologies of liberation. These have emerged out of historical contexts of race, class and gender oppression and have been initiated by Christian communities and individuals who seek to respond to their social, economic and political contexts through the medium of their Christian faith. This study seeks firstly to explore the central criteria for the creation of such theologies and then to use these criteria as a means of exploring the ways in which the Black Led Church has been able to engage with the concept and material realities of liberation within its own British context.

The exploration begins with an analysis of five key developmental themes which have had a significant impact on the Church's relationship to both its theology and its manifestation of liberation. These themes are then further developed through six essential criteria for liberation which are applied to its contemporary interaction in British society. The study argues that the syncretistic foundation of the Church stands as both a source and a limitation to full theological liberation. Nonetheless, a holistic and contextual liberational spirituality does exist and provides an essential energy for both passive and radical change.

The methodological emphasis is contextual. Therefore the study draws heavily from transcripts of interviews and services and also utilises, as much as possible, works produced by Church and network organisations in addition to the observation carried out at five key denominations in Birmingham. The study's emphasis on a contextual understanding of theological liberation is important in that it firmly aligns the Church with meaningful liberation in Britain - not only for its members, but also for wider Black communities. In so doing it highlights the often unacknowledged role of the Church in the cultural and political mobilisation of Black people in British society.

Jesus breaks every fetter
My Jesus breaks every fetter
Jesus breaks every fetter
And He will set you free

Chorus, NTCG.

Yet we who have this spiritual treasure are like common claypots, in order to show that the supreme power belongs to God, not us. We are often troubled but not crushed; sometimes in doubt, but never in despair; there are many enemies, but we are never without a friend; and though badly hurt at times, we are not destroyed.

2 Corinthians 4 v 7-9

INTRODUCTION: TOWARDS A LIBERATIONAL THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

> ***The true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations which we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us. Change means growth and growth can be painful but we sharpen self definition by exposing the self in work and struggle together with those whom we define as different from ourselves, although sharing the same goals....this can mean new paths to our survival.***[1]

This study is concerned with the concept of theological liberation and how it is both interpreted and utilised by those African Caribbean Christians in Britain who are part of the organisational structure known as the Black Led Church (BLC). This introduction explores what might best be described as the signposts towards a theoretical perspective through which the central thesis might best be explored. Audre Lorde's observation above is particularly useful in this task since it applies as much to the subject of the study, the Black Led Church, as it does to the approach taken by myself as researcher.

Firstly, for the Black Led Church, Lorde's observation suggests that the fulfilment of full theological liberation is an objective achieved through potentially painful self-criticism and readjustment. Hence as this study evaluates the evidence for such progress within the Church's theological development in Britain, it will need to be sensitive to the processes of change as well as the forces of resistance to that change. Secondly, the observation makes an important contribution to the discussion of the dissertation's theoretical and methodological approach as is outlined below.

Theoretical Signposts

In his essay on *Religious Ideologies and Social Movements in Jamaica,*[2] Stuart Hall highlights four theoretical approaches to the study of religion. These are 1. Theology: understanding religious practices to reveal certain "sacred 'truths' about the nature of the universe"; 2. Sociology: exploring the "social functions" of "religious institutions"; 3. Anthropology: analysing the "customs, belief systems, culture or 'folkways' characteristic of particular peoples and societies"; and 4. Ideology, his own theoretical approach: "through which social groups or classes represent relationships between the secular and spiritual world and which provide systems of meaning, frameworks of interpretation or intelligibility, through which they 'make sense of' or 'give meaning to' their social existence and justify or legitimate particular interests and actions."[3] There is, it can be argued, a further conceptual approach which can be used to draw on each of the above theoretical components. The discipline of Liberation Theology extends the boundaries of theology, as described by Hall, in that it is concerned with creating a contextual and holistic response to the experience of oppression. In so doing, it seeks to utilise any conceptual tool which will enable it to better understand, identify and respond to the liberational needs of oppressed communities. As Gustavo Gutierrez, one of the leading exponents of the discipline has argued:

> The tools used in this analysis vary with time and according to their proven effectiveness for gaining knowledge of social reality and finding solutions for social problems...All this requires that we refine our analytical tools and develop new ones...The use of variety of tools does not mean sacrificing depth of analysis; the point is only not to be simplistic but rather

> to insist on getting at the deepest causes of the situation, for this is what it means to be truly radical.[4]

The wholeness of the approach is one which makes it particularly suitable for application to the subject of this study. The Black Led Church in Britain is essentially a multi-dimensional organisation. It has, at its core, a spiritual identity which is manifested through culturally specific symbols which themselves have been modified through their interrelation with social, political and economic forces in society. Its members have a unique historical experience of oppression and survival and this has served to influence their contemporary spiritual philosophy as well as their social reality. Hence, since the Church clearly has theological, ideological, anthropological and sociological connections, it is therefore imperative that the theoretical framework used to evaluate the meaning of liberation within its theology should be able to do this from a contextual and also an integrated standpoint. For this reason, not only is this study concerned with the manifestation of theological liberation in the Black Led Churches in Britain, it also draws upon the theoretical discipline of Liberation Theology in order to equip itself to conduct the exercise.

Within the interdisciplinary conceptualisation of Liberation Theology, I have found it useful to engage several epistemological approaches in the pursuit of understanding liberational identity in the Black Led Church. These are best articulated as theoretical signposts since their task is to more clearly define both the conceptual framework of the analysis itself and the subject of analysis. Having identified the general nature of the theoretical approach to the study, it is now appropriate, as Lorde suggests in the opening quotation, to sharpen the definition

through the process of self exposure. This can best be done by identifying the connections and divergences with related areas of study.

The first significant signpost points to the use of theology and ideology as the primary theoretical points of reference for the dissertation. This means that, like Hall, the analysis is concerned with understanding the religious discourse of the BLC in the knowledge that "religious ideologies, however 'other worldly' they appear, inform social practices and have a mobilising 'practical' impact on society."[5] However, in contrast to Hall's separating out of religious disciplines, I am anxious to apply a contextual approach to the study which means that the Church is viewed holistically - using a combination of theoretical approaches. This breadth of analysis is provided by the discipline of Liberation Theology. It is therefore my intention to engage with the theological claims of the Church in addition to the sociological, historical and anthropological meanings. Indeed, within the selected discipline, there is a theological imperative to interact with the spiritual realities of the Church and its gospel and to allow this to form the foundation of all searching for liberational identity. As Leonardo and Clodovis Boff have argued: "every true theology springs from a spirituality - that is, from a true meeting with God in history."[6] It is nonetheless the case that this study agrees with Hall in his identification of the developing nature of religious ideological (theological) discourse and the way in which that development is, to varying degrees, shaped by the initial historical event of formation. In fact his observation that "there is something critically important about the moment of the *formation* of a particular field of meaning"[7] is a central assertion of this study as it evaluates the syncretistic origins of African

Caribbean Christianity in the Caribbean and the developmental themes that have arisen from it. One final point needs to be made before leaving the influence of Hall's work on the theoretical signposting of this study. That is, the dissertation has made a significant degree of use of Gramsci's concept of hegemony and has found useful Hall's analysis of the connections between the latter's work and the study of race and ethnicity.[8] In particular, his understanding of hegemony as "historically specific" and "multi-dimensional"[9] is important when applied to the Church's response to liberation in Britain. By revealing features of particular hegemonic contexts it becomes easier to assess the theological interaction with oppression and liberation.

A second significant theoretical signpost for this study relates to its negotiation of a counter-hegemonic theoretical approach which is able to rest comfortably with the contextual emphasis of the analysis. In its effort to engage with such an approach the study draws from the works of the feminist writer, Patricia Hill Collins,[10] the Afrocentric scholar Molefi Kete Asante[11] and the Liberation Theologian Rubem Alves.[12] Collins and Asante both critique what they identify as a Eurocentric knowledge system and its hegemonic control in the field of academic research. Collins' attack is focused on the "Eurocentric Masculinist knowledge validation process"[13] and its role in marginalising the epistemologies of Black communities and the Black women researchers who seek to draw from them.[14] Asante's critique equally highlights the incompatibilities of using European ways of knowing to understand African social phenomena. He, like Collins, argues against the racialised bias inherent in both positivist and ethnomethodological methods of

engaging in social science and calls for a contextual, Afrocentric science. Asante asserts that "our methodology must be wholistic and integrative; our epistemology, participatory and committed."[15] Their work is important in its attempt to centre the processes of method and theory around the localised knowledge systems of Black communities.

Such a strategy sits comfortably with the interdisciplinary approach explored earlier. However, none of the works drawn upon in this study are adopted unconditionally. Asante, in particular, raises problems in his, at best, ambiguous concern for the interrelation of race and gender in his critique of Eurocentric hegemony. Hence his Afrocentric counter balance appears to ignore or at least to undermine the contribution of women to African ways of knowing.[16] This is a significant omission since this study will argue, as is partially suggested by Collins,[17] that the main source of an Afrocentric epistemology within the Churches is, in fact, the contributory lifestyles of Black women who make up the significant majority of the membership and are increasingly acknowledged as the functional mainstay of the Churches. Moreover, as Delores S. Williams[18] has observed, Asante's patriarchal expression of Afrocentricity fails to significantly challenge the sexism that exists within the Church itself. This is something this study will wish to address. It is therefore necessary to counter what might be described as traditional Afrocentric epistemology with Womanist epistemologies which also draw on Afrocentric ways of knowing for their methodological and theoretical validation. The specific ways in which the study incorporates such an approach is outlined in the section below and is further elucidated in chapter five. Both Collins and Asante are further critiqued for

their use of the essentialised concept of Afrocentric Womanism and Afrocentrism respectively.[19] Moreover both Gilroy and Lemelle have argued that the two may not be as far removed from Eurocentric tradition as they perhaps intend.[20] This possibility certainly returns us to the pertinence of Lorde's observation of the "oppressor within." In heeding her warning, this study wishes to reassert its use of an interdisciplinary approach which draws, in fact, from a number of theoretical sources but which nonetheless seeks to interpret them from within a contextual framework. This framework is defined both by myself as a Black British woman researcher (as is explained below) and by my subject of research.

As we have seen, both Asante and Collins are particularly concerned about the restrictions of Eurocentric methodologies on the exploration of Black social contexts. They are joined in their concern by the theologian Rubem Alves.[21] The issue of contextual methodology forms a third significant theoretical signpost of this study and is explored at length in the section below. In addition to clarifying the methodological concerns of the dissertation, it also affords the opportunity of, more specifically, "exposing the self in work."

Identifying the Researcher

As Asante and Collins have demonstrated, it has been a part of the tradition of Eurocentric and masculinist scientific discourse to pursue objectivity through the anonymity of the researcher. In order that the subject of study can be kept as pure and untouched as possible by the presence of the researcher, the latter should remain voiceless and only empirical data and impartial findings should be expressed within the piece of work being carried out. In addition to Collins and

Asante, this epistemology has come to be challenged by the theologian Rubem Alves,[22] and it will be useful to draw on some of his ideas as part of the process of identifying both the researcher and the methodology.

Firstly, the approach to the dissertation seeks to question the issue of objectivity in much the same way as Alves has drawn attention to the role of emotion and subjective interests within research:

> I don't think a science without emotion is possible. It is my affective relationship to an object that allures or threatens me, that creates the conditions allowing me to concentrate my attention. The object which provoked my interest becomes the focal point of my eyes and mind while the rest of the world becomes a matter of only secondary importance. It was emotion that turned one particular object, amid the limitless multiplicity of possible objects, into the object of my cognition.[23]

There are other reasons why the claim to objectivity in research becomes not only impossible but, perhaps more importantly, undesirable. The principal reason has to do with the role of power relationships within social scientific study presuming that research produces information, information equates to knowledge and knowledge to power. Therefore the hands in which that power lies - in other words, the accessibility of that power - proves to be a matter of extreme importance. It can often be the case that the pursuit of objectivity leads to an obligatory effort to protect the subject from the influence of the researcher. This, in turn, can mean denying access into the research itself which may, ultimately, be to the detriment of that subject since the knowledge produced is about them. In this way research serves to disempower the subjects since they do not have direct access to or

control of it. This inaccessibility, Alves describes, is frequently produced by the kind of language used in social scientific discourse: "I can try to protect those I am investigating by dressing my knowledge in words, categories, and a style inaccessible to them. If I do this, then I do not violate them directly with my knowledge." He goes on to describe, however, what often emerges as the flip side to this action:

> The knowledge thus created was offered to others, but not to the participants in the situation. This poses a danger, since the knowledge *about them* may function in practice as knowledge *against them*. Knowledge is power. It is necessary to know to *whom* such power is being given.[24]

Gunnar Myrdal makes an attempt at a solution when he argues that "the only way in which we can strive for 'objectivity' in theoretical analysis is to expose the valuations to full light, make them conscious, specific, and explicit, and permit them to determine the theoretical research."[25] Part of this process must be, it would seem, to fully identify the researcher and to place him or her squarely within the context of the study. Once this has been achieved, all users of the study, including those who have been the subject of it, can be aware of the subjective influences which have contributed to it. If this stage is reached then perhaps it can become easier to examine the issue of language so that those under research can begin to gain knowledge of and therefore power over the investigative process that they have been part of. This last point will be examined again later.

Within this study it is certainly the case that the choice of subject is closely connected with the subjective orientation of the researcher. Firstly, as an African

Caribbean British woman of predominantly Traditional British Church background, the subject was selected as a means of exploring a phenomenon which has been at the same time distant from and yet familiar to me. The traditional methodological debate of the "insider" versus "outsider", therefore, takes on an interesting dimension.

Secondly, the subject was selected with the intention that "talk about social fact [would be] turned into a social fact."[26] Otherwise stated, it was hoped that the end product would not purely be an academic or theoretical document, but that, in keeping with Collins' "ethic of personal accountability",[27] social activity would be altered or stimulated by it in some way. For this reason too, the study is not intended as an entity in itself but rather as a contribution to a wider body of discourse and social action which is centred around the issue of the significance of the Black Led Church as a movement of resistance in itself and as part of the wider Black community. As such the work of other past and current studies in this area[28] is acknowledged and drawn upon where relevant. Moreover, the intention is that the study will be followed up by further pieces of discourse and social action by myself and others within the subject field - and, it is hoped, most especially by those whom themselves form the subjects of study.

It is further intended that access to knowledge by the subjects of this research remain of prime importance, therefore the issue of language comes, once again, into focus. As Alves' discussion on the power behind language continues:

> The knowledge produced must be a precise tool. But that is not enough. Besides being precise, the tool must be suitable for use. It is useless to make binoculars and microscopes for the blind. Their

> precision isn't worth a thing. When I make a microscope or a pair of binoculars, I have already made a decision; these tools can only be used by people who can see. In like manner, the concepts and categories we employ, and the style we use in our work, function in a deterministic way: they select in advance those who will be able to understand them, and hence use them; and thus they eliminate those who cannot.[29]

It is possible to deduce that if knowledge is power then the language of knowledge is an essential key in unlocking the door to power. This chapter has tried to illustrate, thus far, that not only is it important to identify the research approach, but also to clarify the choice of terminology that has been selected for use within that research. Hence I have chosen and defined the key terms of reference to be used within this study. These are: African Caribbean, African Caribbean Christianity and Black Led Church. In addition to these the terms liberation, theology and Liberation Theology have also been selected and defined. It is anticipated that, through this process, those being investigated can gain easier access into the body of knowledge being presented here so that they can recognise my subjectivities and become part of the discussion about themselves.

Another attempt at making the study as accessible as possible to those being investigated has been made through the use of representative language throughout the study. By this it is meant that every effort has been taken to include the voice of the subjects in describing or assessing the meaning of their interaction and beliefs. In this way it is hoped that the study will consist of voices from three main sources: (1) Written historical and contemporary accounts on issues relating to the BLC and African Caribbean Christianity: (2) Written and oral accounts of the experience of

African Caribbean Christianity from the subjects themselves: and (3) My own analysis drawn from uniting an understanding of the first two sources along with my personal experiences within both BLC and Traditional British Church contexts. It is hoped that this effort will go a long way in addressing the issue of understanding and accessibility mentioned in the earlier quotation by Alves.

Identifying the Methodology

According to Alves, the choice of methodology used is also an indication of the subjective orientation of the researcher and, as such, can serve to either shut out or include the researched into the overall process of the study. The methods selected for use in this study were done on the grounds that they were as inclusive as time and other practical considerations would allow and as such they include both primary and secondary research data. They were: in depth interviews, Church studies, informal discussions, observations and, to a lesser extent, entry questionnaires. By far the greatest emphasis was placed on interviews, discussion and observation - the reason being that these, when combined with historical written accounts, provided a holistic approach to the subject which would not have been possible if focus was given to just one method.

It is important to note at this point that, in keeping with the desire for subject accessibility to the knowledge produced by the study, complete participant observation in the sense of covert observation as described by Burgess[30] was avoided as much as possible. This kind of observation has been practised by others involved in research of African Caribbean Christianity in Britain and the consequence has usually proved of detriment to the subjects involved. For example

Malcolm Calley, in his 1965 study,[31] attempted to solve what he regarded as the problem of being recruited for conversion by those he was studying by taking on the role of convert. In this position he involved himself in "singing, praying, ritual ejaculations and sometimes preaching"[32] all the while accessing information on the 'fellow converts' of which they were not aware. Apart from the obvious ethical issues raised by the falsification of esteemed positions (such as that of preacher), there is also the problem of the powerlessness of the subjects, having no access to the body of knowledge created by Calley. This is especially highlighted by the fact that much of the information gained by his study has since been criticised for its inaccuracy.[33]

Whilst this study has made use of the participant observation method, this has been undertaken by way of Burgess' "participant as observer" model[34] whereby the researcher, when participating in the activity of the group under investigation, does not do so without the permission of the group. Because of the nature of the study it was inevitable that a few of the worshippers in any one service may not have been aware of my status as researcher amongst them; nonetheless, this will have been the exception rather than the rule. It was not my intention to disguise my position in order to obtain research data.

It is also appropriate, here, to draw attention to the debate surrounding the status of the researcher vis-à-vis the research subject: the issue of "insider" versus "outsider." The issue is one that refers back to the idea of subjectivity and value judgements within research and it is something that those who have attempted research within

the BLC have been aware of. Calley, for example, in his previously mentioned study has this to say:

> When I started work on this project I felt that my not being a West Indian, my being white and of superior education to *all*[35] my informants would prove disadvantageous. I am now of the opinion that this was not so, that had I been more like my informants in background, I would have been forced to participate in ways not justified by my research interests.[36]

Although, in the light of his chosen methodology, he does not make clear what some of these "ways not justified" by his "research interests" are, the statement remains a significant one and says as much about Calley's obvious subjectivity as it does about the problematic nature of his findings. Although subsequent researchers[37] have been more sensitive to the difficulties raised by racial, cultural and sometimes sexual differences the issue still remains a problematic one.

On the other side of the "insider/outsider" debate is the potential problem of being too close to the subject of research. This is something to which Carol Tomlin, in her study, draws attention.[38] Aware of the possible negative affects of her subjectivity - being a Black woman Pentecostalist - she makes a conscious effort to "state opinions contrary to her own."[39] As with Alves, it may be best in the end to bring all possible subjectivities to light in order that they might consciously influence theoretical study. As part of this process an observational/research diary was maintained throughout the study and the essence of its findings will be brought to light as an assessment of the methodological data is formed.

As previously mentioned, in the case of this study there is an additional dimension brought into the debate in that the researcher is a Black woman from a Traditional

British Church background[40] and with no long standing or direct connection with the BLC into which research is being carried out. As investigator, this places me in an interesting position being both "insider" and "outsider" and it has certainly been the case that I have found this dual status extremely useful during the entire research process.

In conclusion it may be best to state that the issues of oppression and liberation within the context of Black spiritual experience which form the basis of discussion for the study, are concerns which are directly familiar to me although I was not raised as a member of a BLC. To this extent I am an "insider" relating, in capacities of gender and race, to the struggles which confront the Church. My spiritual and theological background, however, have been formed initially from the influences of the Traditional Baptist Church in which I was raised. This development has since been challenged by the heritage of African Caribbean Christian spirituality which has previously been described as inherent in the experiences of African Caribbean Christians to greater and lesser degrees. My status as "outsider" is apparent firstly in the fact that I was not raised on the specific doctrines, theology and spirituality of the BLC and therefore the functions of this experience were explored without the assumptions often created by over-familiarity. Secondly, it was also evident in the distance created by my 'secular' exposure to African cosmologies and Liberation Theologies which have not always formed part of conventional Christian interpretation from either Black or White traditions. This dual "insider" and "outsider" status was illustrated by the responses I received from the Churches throughout the process of research. Whilst I was recognised as a non-member (sometimes a non-

believer), I was nonetheless accepted as a 'sister' and applauded for and encouraged in my research as a young Black person achieving within a disadvantageous system.

Researching the Churches

The term BLC is an umbrella description which is intended to cover a range of different types of churches which have in common consistent Black leadership and membership at local, national or international levels. The five Churches selected for study here were intended to represent the main theological styles into which such Churches may fall.[41] These are Sabbatarian denominations represented here by (1) the Handsworth Seventh Day Adventist Church (SDA); Oneness Pentecostals represented by (2) First United Church of Jesus Christ Apostolic in Handsworth (FUCJCA); Trinitarian Pentecostals in the form of (3) New Testament Church of God, (NTCG) Handsworth and (4) Shiloh Pentecostal Church in Aston (SPC); and finally the Holiness Tradition represented by (5) Wesleyan Holiness Church also in Handsworth (WHC).

The Churches not only form a representative sample of African Caribbean denominational groups in Britain but they also reflect the range of church types in terms of origins. For example the SDA Church would fall into the category of national leadership which is predominantly White and also has large numbers of White congregants in rural and some urban areas; it has been selected here because most of its urban branches have Black members and pastors, additionally Black leaders are also represented in two of their five main conference areas. In the same way the NTCG is affiliated to the White-dominated American Church of God

but is nonetheless a BLC in Britain as is the case for the WHC with its headquarters in Marion, Indiana. Representing, in terms of formal organisational ties, the independent Churches, are FUCJCA which has its headquarters in Jamaica and SPF which is a Black Led denomination originating in Britain.

Whilst attention is given, in this study, to the different histories, worship styles and theologies of these denominations, they are explored as a collective group which shares in common an African Caribbean spirituality and a constituency drawn originally from the population of Caribbean migrants into Britain in the 1950s. The Churches and the individual branches vary in size from the NTCG, which is one of the largest Black Led denominations, to SPC which is relatively small.[42]

Each Church was researched for a period of two to three months during which time the pastor and at least one other department or auxiliary leader was interviewed along with a sample of between six to ten members from a range of age groups. An introductory questionnaire was distributed by way of access into the organisations and as a means of gathering preliminary information on each. Morning and some evening and/or special services were attended for the period of research in each and the annual and district conventions were attended for two of the Churches. Although the aim of the study is to explore the common features of the BLC with regards to the issue of Liberation Theology, the Churches were not, however, treated, as one homogenous body. Differences which exist between denominations and even between individual churches of the same denominations have been identified and articulated as part of the findings of the study. Nonetheless, the thesis does put forward as legitimate the concept of the BLC as a group identifiable

(as Hall would have it) by certain sociological, anthropological, theological and ideological characteristics. Hence, in addition to researching the five denominations, the study also drew on fieldwork findings from interdenominational conferences, celebrations and interviews with pastors and leaders of other Black Led denominations and organisations.[43] These, together with a range of literature from the five denominations and related bodies comprised the chief sources of data from which the findings of the dissertation have emerged.

Notes and References

[1] Audre Lorde, **Sister Outsider**, (The Crossing Press, 1984) pg. 123.

[2] Stuart Hall, *Religious Ideologies and Social Movements in Jamaica* in Robert Bockock and Kenneth Thompson (eds.) **Religion and Ideology**, (Manchester University Press in association with the Open University, 1985).

[3] Ibid, pgs. 269-70.

[4] Gustavo Gutierrez, *Introduction: Expanding the View*, in **A Theology of Liberation,** (SCM Press, 1974) pgs. xxiv-xxv.

[5] Hall, op. cit, pg. 273.

[6] Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, **Introducing Liberation Theology**, (Burns and Oats, 1987) pg. 3.

[7] Hall, op. cit, pg.. 272.

[8] Stuart Hall, *Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity* in David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, (eds.) **Stuart Hall, Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies**, (Routledge, 1996) .

[9] Ibid, pg. 424 .

[10] Patricia Hill Collins, **Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment**, (Routledge, 1990) .

[11] Molefi Kete Asante, **Afrocentricity,** (Africa World Press Inc., 1988), **The Afrocentric Idea,** (Temple University Press, 1987) and **Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge**, (Africa World Press, 1990).

[12] Rubem A. Alves, **Protestantism and Repression**, (SCM Press, 1985). Most particularly in the preface; *The Moral Intention of Scientific Discourse.*

[13] Collins, op. cit, pg. 203.

[14] Her critique has several components to it which are explored in greater depth in the fifth chapter of this study.

[15] Asante, op. cit. (1990), pg. 28.

[16] For example the identification of the "essential ground" of thinkers contributing to the Afrocentric knowledge base include no women. See Asante (1988). Also see Sidney J. Lemelle, *The Politics of Cultural Existence: Pan Africanism, Historical Materialism and Afrocentricity* in Lemelle and Robin D. G. Kelley (eds.) **Imagining Home: Class, Culture and Nationalism in the African Diaspora**, (Verso, 1994) for a more detailed critique.

[17] Collins, op. cit, pg. 217.

[18] Delores S. Williams, *Afrocentrism and Male-Female Relations in Church and Society* in Cheryl Sanders (ed.) **Living the Intersection, Womanism and Afrocentrism in Theology**, (Fortress Press, 1995) .

[19] See Paul Gilroy, **The Black Atlantic; Modernity and Double Consciousness**, (Verso, 1993) pgs. 52-3, who argues against the use of 'standpoint' epistemologies.

[20] Ibid, also Lemelle, op. cit.

[21] Alves' work is particularly significant in that it represents one of the earliest theoretical considerations of Liberation Theology. See Alves, **A Theology of Human Hope** (Abbey Press, 1975).

[22] Rubem A. Alves, **Protestantism and Repression**, (SCM Press, 1985). Most particularly in the preface; *The Moral Intention of Scientific Discourse.* The idea is also explored by Freire, op. cit.

[23] Ibid, xxvi.

[24] Ibid, xxvii.

[25] As cited in Alves, ibid xxvi.

[26] Alves, ibid xxvi. Words in bracket my own.

[27] Collins, op. cit, pg. 217.

[28] E.g. E. Foster, **Black Women in Black Led Churches: A Study of Black Women's Contribution to the Growth and Development of Black Led Churches,** (M.Phil. Dissertation, University of Birmingham, 1990). I. Brooks, **Where Do We Go From Here? A History of 25 Years of the New Testament Church of God in the United Kingdom - 1955-1980,** (Charles Raper Press, 1982) and **Another Gentleman to the Ministry**, (Compeer Press, No. Date Supplied), J. Edwards, (ed.) **Lets Praise Him Again: An African-Caribbean Perspective on Worship**, (Kingsway Publications, 1992). There are many other studies which are drawn upon in the main body of the dissertation.

[29]Alves, op. cit, xxviii.

[30] Robert Burgess, **In The Field: An Introduction to Field Research**, (Allen & Unwin, 1984) pg. 79.

[31]Malcolm Calley, **God's People: West Indian Pentecostal Sects in Britain**, (Institute of Race Relations, 1965).

[32]Ibid, pg. 147.

[33] Carol Tomlin, **Black Preaching Styles** (M.Phil. Dissertation. University of Birmingham, 1988) for example, makes mention of Calley and Hill in her thesis and implicitly challenges their assumptions in the body of her work.

[34] Burgess, op. cit, pg. 79.

[35] My emphasis.

[36] Calley, op. cit, pg. 148.

[37] For example see Roswith Gerloff, *Black Christian Communities in Birmingham. The Problem of Basic Recognition* in Alan Bryman (ed.) **Religion in the Birmingham Area. Essays in the Sociology of Religion,** (Institute for the Study of Worship and Religious Architecture, University of Birmingham, 1975) She writes:

> To write about black Christian communities in a European industrial city appears to be difficult and dangerous. First and foremost, such an attempt ought to be undertaken, if at all possible, by a member of the black community and not by an outsider like myself. pg. 61.

[38] Tomlin, op. cit.

[39] Ibid, pg. 35 .

[40] Whilst acknowledging the influences of this background, it may be significant to note that I have held no active church membership for the past few years.

[41] Roswith Gerloff has identified seven "denominational streams" however this study does not include African Independent, Revivalistic or Ethiopian Orthodox Church groupings. See Gerloff, *Partnership in Black and White, A Test-Case for the Mission of the British Churches* in **Partnership in Black and White,** (Home Mission Occasional Papers, The Methodist Church Home Mission Division, 1977). Information on the background of the five denominations included can be found in the appendices.

[42]Background details on the Caribbean and British origins of the denominations, are provided in the appendices. This includes approximate membership figures.

[43]The details of these other sources will emerge during the body of the dissertation.

CHAPTER ONE: DEFINING THE TASK

> ***If the Black Christian Churches have, during their brief thirty-year old presence in this country, gained a reputation for ignoring the issues of the world around them, this is no longer true. Their theology may often seem to veer dangerously towards an individualistic escapism, undergirded by a strict ethical code that can be punitive and uncompassionate, but the symbolism of traditional gospel-preacher language can be deceptive***[1]

Bob Nind has, in the above, encapsulated well the key concern of this thesis. He points to the apparent dichotomy between, on the one hand, the external face of the Black Led Christian experience which has often appeared uncompromisingly fundamentalist, doctrine-orientated and other worldly, and on the other hand, the powerful, intrinsic undercurrent of narrative and experience-based orality which has acted seemingly in opposition to this external face. In its role as prominent gatekeeper of the Black Christian experience in Britain, the Black Led Church has largely been responsible for creating and nurturing this specious contradiction. That is to say the Church, since its establishment in Britain, has been a vehicle for many things: it has been a sanctuary and a straight-jacket, a faithful provider and a source of division, a transporter of hope and a protector of the status quo. It has appeared to pursue a vigorous and implicit radicalism whilst verbalising and protecting the ethos of a conservative value system. The intention of this study is to begin to grapple with the circumstances, ideas and systems of belief from whence these contradictions have emerged; to explore the nature in which the Black Led Church in Britain has responded to the ideological and material conditions that it has faced and to identify the historical developments and influences which have enabled it to do so. In so doing the

issue of liberation and the Church's theology will become central to the exploration.

The Black Led Church is an organisation which holds an estimated eighty four and a half thousand people[2] who compile 13% of the total African-Caribbean British population and 66% of the church-going part of that same group.[3] The nature of Black Church life and spirituality also means that its influence often reaches beyond its formal membership, and even beyond those who can be captured by official statistics, out into the ideological identity of African Caribbean communities.[4] The issue of how they have understood, interpreted and responded to the need for liberation in their lives is, therefore, not just one of passing interest but rather it has a significant contribution to make to an understanding of oppression, resistance and liberation concerns for the Black British population as a whole. This is a reality which is still, unfortunately, largely neglected in the accounts of many prominent social scientists from both inside and outside of that community who have focused on the area of Black resistance.[5]

It is certainly the case that, as Nind has suggested and as will later be explored, the BLC has often been a target for criticism which, at the very least, raises questions about the extent of contribution that it has made to the cause of material liberation. For some it has been a pernicious, segregationist sect which serves to hamper constructive race relations.[6] Others have pointed out the colonial legacy of the Church which has encouraged a harmful and uncritical dependency on 'other-worldly' doctrine and practice.[7] Less frequently, however, has the Church's own voice been heard, its own interpretations and understandings sought out and analysed. The work on which this study wishes

to embark involves confronting the paradox of the meaning of liberation within the BLC and it seeks to do so by engaging with the voices who have created and continue to create this meaning.

Liberation and theology have made a vital and radical alliance in the contexts of several key religious movements which have emerged out of the experiences of oppressed peoples in the latter decades of the twentieth century. Such examples include the Liberation Theologies of Latin America, Africa and Black America. Since it is the intention of this study to explore the reflective relationship between Liberation Theology and the BLC in Britain, these case studies will be utilised as an effective means of: firstly, establishing some commonly agreed principles of a theology of liberation and, secondly, assessing the scope of its development within the British context in the light of these principles. It is an assertion of this thesis that, in spite of the many criticisms levelled against it, the BLC can lay claim to being part of this wider, international heritage of resistance. More fully articulated, then, this study will attempt to reveal that the BLC has emerged out of a Caribbean heritage of resistance and innovation which has enabled it to create a context of what will be described as predominantly passive, but also partially active, radicalism in response to the various forms of discrimination and oppression it has faced.

Chapter Overview

The process of legitimising such an assertion will begin with an exploration into the meaning of the terms around which the debate focuses and the methods by which analysis is being carried out; this is the purpose of the current chapter. It will continue in chapter two with the establishing of certain paradigms of

liberation through which the meaning and practice of liberation through theology can further be assessed and explored.

These will include the Liberation Theology of Latin America, Black Theology for liberation in America, Caribbean Emancipatory Theology and African Liberation Theology. The intention here will be twofold: (a) to identify the significant theoretical tenets of these theologies within their specific contexts, and (b) to explore and assess aspects of these theologies which are able to relate to the British context and the identities of the BLC. This chapter will also begin to make a distinction between the manifestation of liberation within formal and informal theologies. To assist in this process two alternative paradigms, which draw upon the experiences of America and the Caribbean, will also be examined.

Chapter three will continue to outline the theoretical parameters of the study by carrying out a thematic historical analysis of the BLC within its Caribbean and British contexts. The purpose in so doing will be to establish the precedent for liberational activity and identity within the creation and development of African Caribbean Christianity. Through a focus on several key themes, including innovation and conservatism, heritage and syncretism, it will be possible to trace the evolution of the Church's current dual manifestation of radicalism; (passive and active) and the way this has created possibilities for a spiritually liberational identity.

The fourth chapter will begin to introduce the research findings within a context of critical analysis that will draw on the details and queries raised by the preceding three chapters. In essence what this chapter will attempt to do is to allow the voices of the Church to address some of the concerns and criticisms raised by established theologies of liberation as formerly described. In so doing

the literatures and studies of those both inside and outside of the BLC experience will also be utilised in order to assess the reality of liberation in the life and theology of the Church. What will begin to emerge here, in the light of the issues raised, is the precise and contextual nature of liberation and of theology within the day-to-day reality of the Church. This reality will then be carried forward into chapter five which aims to put forward and expand upon the central concept of passive and active radicalism as a means of clarifying and understanding the nature of liberational response by the BLC to the material and spiritual concerns it has faced. These concepts are also examined by way of internal criticism regarding the role the Church has adopted. This will be explored in the light of the fieldwork findings as well as through the insights provided by the international paradigms of theological liberation.

The final chapter will examine the possible ways forward for the BLC in its development and manifestation of a theology of liberation in Britain. It will explore the changing roles of the Church vis-à-vis the wider Black community and the Historical/Traditional British denominations. It will also identify the sources of potential internal division as well as of unification within individual Churches and between Church groups and denominations. Central to the discussions of the chapter will be the attempts to discover the possibilities of, and requirements for, a move from passive to active radicalism. The study concludes with an assessment of the plausibility and the nature of a Black British Liberation Theology for the twenty first century.

The scope of the dissertation falls within boundaries that can best be described through the process of defining key identities within the study. Hence this initial chapter begins with a delineation of the participants and of the institution they

hold membership to. This will then lead on to the more theoretical exploration of the meaning of the key terms of liberation and theology.

Identities of the Participants

The study aims to explore the meaning of liberation for those who hold membership of a range of denominations which have collectively been identified as the Black Led Church. Whilst it is recognised that this term is generally used inclusively to describe the range of African[8] as well as Caribbean and Black British denominations, this study applies a much more specific definition which only focuses on the latter two elements of this description, and consequently, the majority of members within those institutions can be identified as African Caribbean rather than African. When using the term *African Caribbean* throughout this study the group being referred to includes those initial migrants from the Caribbean islands to Britain during the period of heaviest influx in the 1950s and '60s as well as their children; the first, second and in some cases third generations.

African Caribbean Christianity is used within this study to refer to the combination of theology and spirituality that makes up the African Caribbean religious identity. It is intended to describe this identity as it is manifested both inside the Caribbean and in Britain; not as identical experiences but rather as linked historical trajectories. This suggests a close and special relationship between the two which is underpinned by theological heritage and, as the study will suggest, spiritual radicalism. The differences between the two are revealed by the specific sociological stimuli of the two contexts and are defined by the contextual nature of their development as will emerge in the body of the work.

The use of the term African Caribbean Christianity is meant to illustrate fundamental syncretisms which have taken place between Africa and the Caribbean and then between the Caribbean and Britain. These processes will also be explored further in chapter three. It is also employed as a means of showing the essential differences between the religious heritage of African Caribbean people and that of their European counterparts. As a practical religious expression it is something that can be applied to the majority of African Caribbean Christian believers in Britain, whether they worship inside or outside of a BLC context. This is because it represents a value system and spiritual reality that differs substantially from that applied within European religious expressions. It needs, therefore, to be identified independently. The very heart of this difference can be explained by the twin terms of continuity and conflict. Continuity represents what one writer has described as the "African soul in Caribbean religion"[9]; the commonality of world views and especially spiritual world views amongst diasporan Africans.[10] Conflict is indicative of the element of readjustment to the impositions of European religious culture as symbolised by physical and ideological slavery and colonialism. These twin forces have informed African Caribbean Christianity, thereby creating a need to distinguish it from the Christianity practised traditionally and in varied forms by Europeans. The principles of continuity and conflict emerge again in the thematic overview of the Church in its Caribbean context.

The Religious Organisations

African Caribbean Christianity, as previously indicated, is something that incorporates the Christian experience of most African Caribbean people. It is an assertion of this study, however, that it is a phenomenon experienced to varying

degrees. When one considers African Caribbean Christianity in Britain, this is especially the case. It has already been suggested that its key features are a culturally distinguishable theology and spirituality. The specifics of this identity will be explored in the body of the work, however it is important to observe here that the extent to which these elements are given scope to develop and flourish is frequently determined by the environment in which they are housed. The suitability of such an environment can be determined by a given number of variables which àssist in drawing a distinction between the defined identity of the BLC and a more general African Caribbean Christianity. These would include, for example, (1) Is it an environment which allows free expression of such a theology and spirituality? (2) Does it provide the structures to enable religious identity to gain momentum from shared expression and belief? (3) Is this identity encouraged and confirmed from within the realms of leadership? (4) Is it reaffirmed by engagement with social reality outside of the Church? If a greater number of these affirmed conditions is taken to indicate a greater level of concentrated African Caribbean Christian activity, then the organisational structure of the BLC can be said to house the most useful, holistic representation of African Caribbean Christianity in British society. The BLC, then, draws upon and makes full use of the conditions which are conducive to the flourishing of spirituality and theology within an African Caribbean Christian perspective. It is for this reason that it has been selected for the purpose of analysis.

The term 'Black Led' rather than simply 'Black' Church has been chosen mainly as a result of research findings. The latter term would appear to mean different things to different people. For some it indicates a level of exclusivity that may be

considered unacceptable or inaccurate. For others, it suggests a pattern in leadership that may not be consistent with the entire hierarchical structure of the church or denomination. I wish to avoid these difficulties by employing the term 'Black Led Church' and using it to refer to the individual church or group of churches under investigation but not, unless specified, to entire sets of international denominations. Hence for example, the Handsworth Seventh Day Adventist Church is referred to as Black Led although it is recognised that as a national denomination, the central hierarchy of leadership is predominantly White. Having abandoned the phrase 'Black Church', however, there are many aspects of such a definition that have been incorporated into the meaning of 'Black Led Church' as it is used in the study.

In keeping with the former discussion, another possibility would be to refer to the set of focus denominations as the 'African Caribbean Church'. Such a term, however, has not been selected for use within this study. This is due to its unfamiliarity among the participant group and also because, in view of the reservations many Church members have with the use of 'Black Church' it was considered that to substitute 'African Caribbean Church' would not tackle, any better, their fundamental objections.

The difficulties involved in finding an appropriate identity label have existed since researchers first approached the Church as establishment in Britain some forty years ago. Until recently, the majority of studies carried out in this area were by White researchers who created for themselves labels which they felt appropriate for their subject.[11] Very often these did not take into consideration the identities that the participants would choose to describe for themselves. In fact, the choices made were often regarded as inappropriate by those being

described. Ira Brooks, for example, in his account of the establishment of the New Testament Church of God in Britain, writes:

> We have come to be referred to by the term 'black-led'. This is not the way we see ourselves. The term to us seems to separate white from black Christians in one church. However because the term has become widely familiar, I shall use it for convenience sake.[12]

More recently, African Caribbean Christians have begun to document their own experiences and have, consequently, been involved in the process of self-definition. A most notable contribution to this area is Arlington Trotman's *Black, Black-led or What?*[13] As well as pointing out the limitations of previously used terms from 'sect' to 'black', 'black-led' or 'Afro-Caribbean' Church, Trotman begins to suggest that a more suitable alternative would include an acknowledgement of the theological roots of the Churches which have largely been Holiness-Pentecostal. This, he suggests, would also bring the Church in line with those 'mainstream' Churches who have been named according to their theological origins.[14]

The terminology debate, of course, does not end here. The material presented in this dissertation illustrates the complexity of the identity issue. It reflects the range of opinions within the Church; from those who favour a distinctive cultural/ethnic label, to those who wish to emphasise spiritual and theological realities. As will become clear, the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

The study, then, has selected the identity label 'Black Led Church', while recognizing that perhaps a more appropriate label is due to be selected and consolidated from within the current internal discussion of the believers. It has been selected as a supplement to the term African Caribbean Christianity, and,

as in the case of the latter term, is meant to incorporate both the historical/cultural orientation and the spiritual/theological emphasis of the church-goers. With this said, I wish to clarify the meaning I attach, henceforth, to the designation of Black Led Church. The definitions offered below are inclusive so that any number of the points may apply:

1. The Black Led Church refers to consistent Black[15] leadership at local levels.

2. The Black Led Church refers to consistent Black leadership at national overseer levels.

3. The Black Led Church refers to consistent Black leadership at international or national headquarters level.

4. The Black Led Church refers to predominantly Black congregations at local church level where consistent Black leadership at local or national level also exists.

5. The Black Led Church refers to predominantly Black congregations at national and/or international level.

6. The Black Led Church refers to the institution which, in addition to any of the above, meets the conditions for conducive environment of African Caribbean Christianity as previously outlined.

In accordance with the above definitions, a church can be classified as Black Led even if its international headquarters are not and even if, within the national denomination, there are local churches which are not. The study, then, will use the description 'Black Led Church' according to the above and in reference to the predominant British institution manifesting the phenomena of African Caribbean Christianity.

It is also appropriate to make reference to the term 'Traditional British Church' which is used, in this study, to denote the main non Black Led denominations within British society and includes groups such as the Church of England, Baptists, Methodist, Elim Pentecostals as well as the numerous Evangelical congregations and fellowships throughout the country. Many of these congregations, of course, do include African Caribbean Christian worshippers and in some cases they may even be represented within the leadership structures of the organisations. However they have not been classified here as Black Led Churches because they do not meet the criteria of 'consistent Black leadership' as defined earlier. The extent to which they are able to provide a conducive environment for the growth and maintenance of African Caribbean Christianity is an issue that the study will not be able to address at length although some preliminary investigations were attempted as part of the research process.[16]

The term Traditional British Church is intended to be representative of both new and more established denominations and groups of White majority Churches although it is recognised that vast differences in policy and organisation exist between the various groups.[17] It should, perhaps, be pointed out that whilst each of the terms thus far considered may seem to prove unhelpful when exploring the context of African Caribbean Christianity in the Caribbean, the essence of the definitions in each case will be of value. For example, the issue of British traditions or heritage within some Caribbean denominations is still very much relevant and leads naturally onto the question of indigenisation and syncretism.

In summary then, the following identity names have been selected for use within the study; *African Caribbean*, to describe the ethnicity of the group in question,

African Caribbean Christianity to describe, in particular, the spiritual but also the theological manifestation of their faith and *Black Led Church* to identify the institution which, in the greatest, holistic sense, is able to encourage and nurture both the system of belief and its expression. From this basis it is now possible to carry out an assessment of the focal principles of exploration; theology and liberation.

Liberation and Theology in Context

1. Liberation

The term liberation presupposes a state of oppression from which deliverance Is being sought. As such it would appear that a definition necessitates a complex process of identification of the range and causes of oppression within a broad spectrum of contexts as well as a discussion of the nature and modes of freedom from it. What this section intends to do is something substantially less ambitious in that it will limit the discussion to the concept of liberation and oppression as it relates to the context of the Church. Even so, the scope for analysis is a potentially broad and complex one.

Before commencing this discussion it is important to observe that the general task, as indicated above, has been taken up in numerous forms by philosophical as well as sociological discourse and analysis. What such disciplines are able to consistently reveal is the very complex nature of the concept and the subsequent multiplicity of meanings which emerge from any exploration into it. Philosophers, in particular, have been concerned with the meaning of liberation as a word which holds political, psychological and linguistic connections to other words such as freedom and liberty. As Gibbs has observed, "it is not unusual for more time to be spent analysing and defining

terms than using them."[18] Since this is not the intention here it may be best to simply extract from the discipline a contribution towards a working understanding of liberation within the context for which it will be employed in this dissertation. Particularly useful, it seems, is the idea that liberation "always involves the absence of barriers, burdens or interference; and it always involves the presence of the power to do, have or be something good."[19] When applied locally, this dual-focused definition can be summed up by the suggestion that for a situation, or in the case here, an institution and a theology to be liberational, it must respond to sources of disadvantage which are rooted internally in its structure as well as those which are embedded within the wider hegemony of external society; liberation must be holistic.

The concept of liberation also appears within the educational field under the guise of radical pedagogy such as that suggested by the Brazilian theorist, Paulo Freire.[20] Engaging with the social sciences in as much as he is concerned with the implications for education of class oppression, Freire calls for a radical revisiting of pedagogic approaches that will lead to the current objectification of the poor being transformed into a 'conscientization' of the poor, since, as he argues, "one of the gravest obstacles to the achievement of liberation is that oppressive reality absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge men's consciousness".[21] He also adds to the understanding of liberation in that he argues that this process of conscientization is one which must be undertaken both by the radical, newly enlightened oppressor as well as the radical, newly enlightened oppressed if a lasting and meaningful solidarity is to be achieved. Freire's most significant insight into liberation for the current context, however,

must be his understanding of the vital importance of the dual roles of action and reflection in the process of liberation. As he argues:

> Authentic liberation - the process of humanization - is not another 'deposit' to be made in men. Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men upon their world in order to transform it.[22]

Thus far it can be said, then, that liberation must offer both internal and external critique in its attack against oppression. It must involve radical praxis and it must address itself to the creation of a new and holistic consciousness in the minds and actions of those who would attempt to implement change.

2. Liberation and Black Resistance

Social Science, as would be expected, has occupied itself with the meaning and relevance of liberation as it relates to action and interaction in society. In terms of the variably connecting issues of race, class and gender experiences in Britain, it has been particularly represented by sociological studies into Black[23] resistance. The focus here has been on the influence and detrimental impact of race, class and also gender discrimination on the non-White (especially African, African Caribbean and Asian) communities in Britain and the varied ways in which individual and collective groups of 'minorities' have sought to respond to this.

In the main, key British sociological accounts of this area have fallen into four broad categories.[24] Although these categories are not entirely static and certainly relate to each other through exchanges of ideas and concepts they can be identified as Marxist/economic determinist, cultural criticism/critical studies, feminist/womanist, and gay/lesbian. The first label has been explored, most notably by the writings of Sivanandan,[25] but also by others in the field[26] who

seek to highlight the relationship between oppression and class, ethnicity and politics. One of the earliest and most significant contribution to the second approach to resistance and oppression in Britain was the work of Stuart Hall[27] and was continued in the much cited work of Lawrence, Gilroy and others.[28] The arguments which seek to explore the nature of Black British oppression and resistance through a multi-disciplinary approach have been continued in the writings of academics such as and Stephen Small.[29] Feminist and Womanist interpretations of resistance and oppression have, as would be expected, focused on the ways in which Black women have been affected by the wider concerns of race and class oppression whilst simultaneously being disadvantaged by the more specific issues of gender exploitation and discrimination. The most comprehensive and pioneering work in this field as far as the experience of the Black British woman is concerned is that of Bryan, Dadzie & Scafe.[30] Other contributors include Carby[31] and more recently Marshall, Charles, Simmonds and others.[32] The fourth sociological category is that of gay/lesbian analysis and adds the issue of sexuality and ideological and socio-political discrimination to the wider interpretation of Black British oppression and liberation. [33]

The concerns of Black British liberation have, however, extended far beyond the immediate interests and articulation of sociology and should, most accurately, be regarded as trans-textual particularly when 'text' is interpreted as 'academic' text. In this light it would also be appropriate to make mention of wider sources and influences in the Black British analysis of liberation. There is, for example, the Pan Africanist and Afrocentric socio-historical and cultural interpretation of oppression and liberation which has been disseminated through conferences

and celebration days[34] and also through popular publications.[35] There is also, for final consideration here, the spiritual/cultural translations of issues of oppression and liberation which have been vocalised in the form of protest music and poetry[36] and, in more explicitly spiritual forms, have been articulated through the media of the Nation of Islam,[37] Rastafarianism, neo-African faiths[38] and, as this thesis has begun to maintain, African Caribbean Christian expression. Acknowledgement of these sociological and contextual interpretations of resistance reinforce the idea of holistic liberation as described earlier and provide a useful and even essential prelude for an exploration of theology and, in particular, a theology of liberation.

3. Race, Class and Gender

The thesis has established itself around the identification of liberational activity within the BLC. As such, the Church is seen as interacting with the social, economic and political realities of race (racialisation), class and gender in British society. Within the earlier years of British social scientific theory the concepts of race and gender were invariably connected either ideologically, socially or politically with that of class. This is evidenced, for example, in the Marxist and Neo-Marxist influenced works of Rex and Tomlinson, and Robert Miles.[39] Later attempts at articulating the theoretical placing of race - particularly that by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies' *Empire Strikes Back* - challenged these reductionist approaches. The work of Lawrence, Gilroy and others sought to explore the distinctives of Black experiences in Britain from a wider framework than economic factors alone would allow.[40] Contemporary analysis has built on this foundation by seeking to highlight the diversity and contextuality of racisms and of ethnicities.[41]

In the light of these new developments, this study understands all three categories to be multiply identified both in their relationship to ideology, economics and politics and in the sense that they are each differentially experienced by complex and heterogeneous communities in British society. It is understood, therefore, that African Caribbean communities in Britain do not have a homogenous relationship to oppression. Moreover, many of the variables inherent within race, class and gender concerns also exist within the membership of the Churches. The approach here views the contemporary manifestations of interrelated racialised oppression to be linked to colonial and imperialist precedents in history.[42] Therefore the Churches' strategies for interaction with contemporary circumstances of oppression are themselves historically evolved.

The developments within BLCs since their establishment in Britain in the 1950s are of particular interest to the discussion of 'new ethnicities' since they represent a form of political and cultural mobilisation in which a number of concerns interact both internally and externally. In terms of economics, Clifford Hill has suggested that the Churches were, from their inception, constructed from the migrant new middle classes - those who, for example, owned their own cars and homes.[43] It could be argued that the children and grandchildren of these earlier generations have maintained their economic edge over the majority of the African Caribbean population, and have additionally improved their educational and professional status during the 1980s and 90s.[44] Yet Hill also shows evidence for the fact that the highest period of growth in the Churches (between 1960-70) was linked to the period of social deprivation and a "hardening of racial attitudes."[45] Moreover, since the late 1980s, in a

contemporary context of economic recession and increasingly diverse 'New Right' racialised oppression,[46] the Churches have expanded their social programmes and ecumenical links with wider Black communities. The implication of this is significant for the considerations of this study. It demonstrates, firstly, that their relatively privileged economic status compared to the majority African Caribbean community has not exempted them from racialised discrimination. Secondly and most significantly, it reveals that the Churches have maintained a wider cultural and political allegiance to African Caribbean communities and have served, effectively, as organisations of ideological and political mobilisation.[47] Concerns of gender have similarly been an integral part of the Churches' interrelation with race and class identity. As has been suggested in the introduction, the underpinning cultural and ideological epistemology of the Church has been considerably influenced by the contributions of women. This is of particular significance since Black women within the Churches, and of course within society, have cut across racialised, economic and gender based identities. The ways in which women have begun to articulate their experiences within the Churches and in British society will, for these reasons, be of particular interest to this study.

When identifying race, class and gender oppression, then, the study is concerned with the integrated experiences of social, economic, political and ideological discrimination that have contributed to shaping the identities of African Caribbean people in Britain. It relates to the well-documented experience of discrimination in housing, employment and education,[48] to the bipartisan racialised immigration policy of the past four decades,[49] to the disadvantageous relationship of Black people in the criminal justice system[50] and to NHS

provisions, most particularly in the area of mental health,[51] to the maintenance of a racialised ideology of inferiority manifested in 'new racisms' and presented through the media, in contemporary social and pseudo-sciences.[52] It relates, too, to the gender related stereotypes and 'common sense' notions concerning Black men and women and their families in British society,[53] the disproportionately adverse effect of 'New Right' policies on single mothers and on the unemployed; to the additional contentions of Black women experiencing domestic violence, immigration restrictions and gender related discrimination in the home, the media and the workplace.[54]

This study is concerned with the impact of historical, institutionalised, ideological and internalised race, class and gender oppression on the experiences, and most significantly, the development of theology within the BLCs with regard to such modes of oppression.

4. 'Dominant' Theology and Liberation Theology

Theology has elsewhere been described as "*human* speech about God."[55] It is an attempt at identifying those characteristics and qualities of the divine which are comprehensible to human beings and, most significantly, comprehensible in the material contexts in which human beings find themselves. If it is true, however, that "human speak" about God must be contextually intelligible then it becomes necessary to make distinctions between different kinds of theology and, furthermore, different levels of theology.[56] This may involve the identification of theologies which in reality promote alienating discourse and which separate action from ideas and those who create knowledge from those who receive it. The first stage of the exploration into meaning, therefore, is

concerned with the concept of 'dominant theology'[57] whilst the second stage will examine the meaning and purpose of theologies of liberation.

This 'dominant' or Western theology has been characterised by two main features. The first is a universalising and authenticating of Graeco-Roman historical sources for doing "proper" theology. This process has been closely aligned with the wider historical justification for the superiority and necessary prominence of Western cultures, [58] and has meant that, as one theologian has argued, "antiquity... has become a primary means of affirming this guardianship as oracle and legitimising what is "authentic and correct," to the exclusion of non-Graeco-Roman cultures." [59] The second attribute of 'dominant theology' is its close association with the Enlightenment preoccupation with the 'coming of age' of society; an idea which has been of particular interests to social scientists. This principle, sees Western civilisation as reflecting an historical process which has evolved to a state of advancement in which religion has outlived it traditional purpose in modern society and has subsequently left society in an increasingly secularised condition[60]. The understanding of this shift in the nature of religion has led to the development of varied theologies (and sociologies) of secularisation which interpret modern religious expression as being relegated to the role of 'privatised' faith.[61] This, in turn, has spurred a further development that has become known as Political Theology[62] and which attempts to reverse the progress of a privatised theology which is characterised by individual choices and responses and limited influence in the public domain. European theologians such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Karl Barth, and perhaps most notably, Johann Metz, have attempted, then, to counterbalance what is perceived of as the negative effects of privatised religion by making what they regard to be vital links

between personal (privatised) faith and the oppressed structures of society (a critical deprivatization). In reality this involves theologians interacting with the public world and "allow[ing] themselves to be interrupted by the mute suffering of a people."[63]

Whilst Political Theology offers at least a radical realignment of the public and private arenas, and in so doing finds itself forming a theoretical basis for a theology for the oppressed, it has, nonetheless, been criticised for its basic assumptions about the global nature of religion and the process of secularisation.[64] This is sufficient criticism to place political theology within the general tradition of 'dominant theology' since it has sought to redress the implications of that theology without challenging its fundamental suppositions. An attempt to identify and summarise the key characteristics of 'dominant theology' has been made by Brown in his work on the liberation theologian, Gustavo Gutierrez.[65] His insights fall into eight distinct areas which are; 1. The focus on the non-believer who is threatened by modern society. 2. Modernity as a point of departure and "thought orientation" as principle methodology. 3. The privileged position of the originators. 4. The Whiteness and success of those who write and maintain it. 5. The focus on a "religious world that needs to be reinforced." 6. The inextricable connection with Western culture Whiteness, maleness and bourgeois classes. 7. The affirmation of the achievements of culture and the "bourgeois spirit" and 8. The emphasis of the amelioration of existing structures. In the light of the original definition of theology provided earlier, then, 'dominant theology' can best be described as privileged, Westernised human reflection on God.

The interpretation of theology that links it with faith and practice and encourages the formulation and delivery of theological concepts from the ranks of the collective group, is one which begins to make the links between theology and liberation and fits it into the mould of conscientization already prepared by thinkers such as Freire:

> All members of the people of God think about their faith: all of them, not only the professionals, "do" theology in a way. There can, indeed be no faith without a minimum of theology. ..All who believe want to understand something of their faith. And as soon as you think about faith you are already doing theology....The subject of faith is the subject of theology.[66]

Liberation Theology[67] is theology which seeks to work against the restrictions of 'dominant theology' in that it emphasizes the significance of historical and cultural placing[68] and poses for itself a series of questions which are radically different from those posed by political and dominant theology. Its main concerns, then, are contextual ones and do not emerge from the same preoccupation with modernity but rather are focused upon the concerns of human struggle. If, as Gutierrez has suggested, dominant theology attempts to respond to the issues raised by the non-believer, then what he also makes clear is that Liberation Theology is concerned with addressing the demands made by the non-person.[69] As the theologian Theo Witvliet argues, the difference is one which goes beyond purely theological principles:

> ...it is rooted in the specific reality of domination and dependence, of the struggle over class, race and sex. The position adopted by liberation theologians calls for profound reflection on this difference in social context and on the methodological questions which it raises.[70]

Liberation Theology is, then, a theology for and from the margins of society which, since it is created by and answerable to marginalised peoples, seeks to make use of the critical tools of social science in order to properly assess the social, political and economic realities of the oppressed before translating this back to a theological context. Moreover it aims to do so by applying methods of praxis which are appropriate to the geographical, social and historical conditions of the marginalised group or groups. The contextual requirement of Liberation Theology means that it is by no means monolithic. However, although it is contextually applied it is, nonetheless, determined by certain focal criteria through which its existence, although not its specific nature, can be universally identified. The next chapter will distinguish these criteria by evaluating the key characteristics of several international paradigms of theological liberation. Once identified these liberational principles will serve as an essential guide in the exploration of the British context.

This chapter, then, has put forward the thesis that the BLC is an institution which has responded to the needs of its adherents through the creation and manifestation of a dual identity and that whilst some have mistaken this double-mindedness for a sign of conservatism, it can more accurately be described as its own style of Liberation Theology. In order to begin to justify such a view, the chapter has attempted to explore the main identities which will form the focus of this study whilst the introduction has described the intentions and nature of the methodology used to research them. It has also begun to identify the meaning of liberation, in particular, Liberation Theology, and has presented it principally as a mode of spiritually inspired praxis which seeks to draw out, explain and ultimately eliminate both the causes and the symptoms of oppression.

Furthermore, it asserts that the main point of reference in both describing oppression and initiating liberation must be, first and foremost, the oppressed themselves. How this theology has been applied in the contexts of the oppressed will be explored next.

Notes and References

[1] Bob Nind: *Black Churches in the Inner City - A View Point from Brixton* in **Christian Action Journal** (Centre for Black and White Christian Partnership **Autumn 1982**) pgs. 22-23.

[2] This figure is put forward by Iain Macrobert *The New Black Led Churches in Britain* in Paul Badham's (ed.) **Religion State and Society in Modern Britain** (Edwin Mellen Press, 1989) but is obviously now dated. This figure does not distinguish between African and African-Caribbean Churches, a distinction that this study does seek to make. The diverse nature of BLCs makes it difficult to obtain accurate statistical information concerning Church numbers. Many smaller Churches are not represented by broader statistics and even larger Churches have not always been fully accounted for by these statistics. The need for a more thorough and systematic accumulation of data concerning the BLC has been identified by the recently appointed executive director of the Centre for Black and White Christian Partnership, Bishop Aldred, himself a leader of the Church of God of Prophecy in Birmingham.

[3] Gerald Parsons (ed.) *Filling a Void? Afro-Caribbean Identity and Religion* in **The Growth of Religious Diversity; Britain from 1945** (Routledge in association with the Open University, 1993) pg. 246. He also suggests that in the mid nineteen eighties the membership figure was nearer to 100, 000 members.

[4]For example although adherents and irregular visitors are sometimes accounted for in individual denominational or Church statistics, it is not so easy to quantify the popular spiritual views and values which form an increasingly significant part of the Black 'conscience' and which, *in some part*, have been nurtured or stimulated by the Black Christian ethos. One such example would be Rastafarianism which in spite of its rejection of Imperialist impositions nonetheless utilises Biblical text and imagery. (see for example Barry Chevannes (ed.) **Rastafari and other African-Caribbean World Views** (Macmillan 1995) pgs. 9-11. Other, more contemporary examples are discussed at greater length in the chapter six.

[5] One notable exception to this is perhaps the work of Stuart Hall who has contributed to the exploration of Black faith, culture and resistance in documentary and written forms. For example Hall in Bockock and Thompson, op. cit.

[6] See for example Calley, op. cit. pgs. 144-5 and Clifford Hill, **West Indian Migrants and the London Churches** (OUP, 1963) pg. 74.

[7] For example Paul Grant, *'If it happened to you, tell me, what would you do'* in Grant and Patel (eds.) **A Time to Speak; Perspectives of Black Christians in Britain** (Racial Justice & Black Theology Working Group, 1990). Louis Charles Harvey has described it as "living on the Hallelujah side" *From Rejection to Liberation: The Development of the Black Church in Great Britain and the United States* in **Racial Justice** (No. 6, Spring 1987) pg. 22. Some of this criticism has, of course, come from Black political, cultural or religious groups who have argued that the Church has reflected a 'White man's religion' which has no relevance to the Black experience and which has functioned very directly to encourage passivity and acceptance of the status quo. Many of these points are, for example, raised by Rastafarianism and are implicit in the newer, African-American influenced religious and cultural movements, as will be explored in chapter six.

[8] For example the Cherubim and Seraphim or the Aladura International. The majority of these Churches have originated from West Africa; in particular Ghana and Nigeria.

[9]Kortright Davis, **Emancipation Still Comin'** (Orbis Books, 1990) Chapter four.

[10] Commonality in this context is meant to refer to certain shared key principles and approaches. It is not meant to suggest complete homogeneity.

[11] For example see Malcolm Calley, op. cit pg. 2-3, who describes them as West Indian Sects on the basis that they recruit by voluntary association rather than natural increase.
[12]Ira Brooks, (1982), introduction.

[13] Arlington Trotman, *Black, Black-led or What?* in Joel Edwards (ed.) **Lets Praise Him Again! An African-Caribbean Perspective on Worship**, (Kingsway Publications, 1992)

[14] Ibid pg. 32-33.

[15] Black, within this context, is meant to refer specifically to African Caribbeans.

[16] During the research process I interviewed the pastor and several members of the Baptist Church in Handsworth, spoke to the Church of England's first Black woman deacon, Eve Pitts, the Baptist Church's first ordained Black woman minister, Kate Coleman and also drew on my own experience of membership of a mixed Baptist congregation in London. I was also able to use secondary research sources such as the Heather Walton study of the Methodist Church (**A Tree God Planted; Black People in British Methodism**) and the Church of England (**Seeds of Hope**) report. The attitudes represented in these varied accounts illustrated a certain ambiguity of identity amongst non BLC Black Christians in their relationship with their churches. Many were happy to be part of a spiritual community that consisted of a variety of cultures and yet generally speaking they did not feel that their particular cultures were adequately represented within those communities. This was especially the case when it came to leadership.

There was a feeling that White co-worshippers were still somewhat ignorant of racism within society and the implications this still held for relationships within the Church. As a consequence relations were somewhat strained and the Black Christian was not able to be him/herself with the varied dimensions that this involved. One interviewee, for example, felt that as a Black member of a Traditional British Church you had to "pretend nothing's bothering you even although it might be." (Interview respondent, Baptist Church) Eve Pitts spoke of the inability of the Church to understand and incorporate elements of Black spirituality when she argued that "there have been a lot of Black Anglicans who have been afraid to express that spirituality." This, she felt was largely due to the fact that "the Church is not equipped to enable Black Anglicans, especially young Black Anglicans, to take on board expressions of their own faith." (Eve Pitts from a recorded interview, April 1992.)

Whilst many individual churches have begun to make an effort to cater for the material and spiritual needs of their Black congregants a basic problem remains. The main dilemma presented within the Black Christian's relationship with the Traditional British Church is essentially that the theology and spirituality of that institution was created from, and remains directed along the need and interests of, those who share a very different relationship to systems of power than do Black Christians. Hence these Christians experience, first hand, the influences of an historically Eurocentric spiritual and theological identity. One interviewee phrased it thus, in response to the question, *does the Church give you guidance and direction for living your life as a Black man in British society?*

> It can't do because the leadership is White, they can't give us guidance on how a Black person should live. The only thing is the Bible, its open to interpretation.
> (Interview respondent, Baptist Church)

On this basis, this study has argued that in spite of the restrictions of a BLC which in many cases retains international links with White overseers, the BLC is, nonetheless, better able to serve the material and spiritual requirements of their African Caribbean congregants. This, above all, is reflected in the way in which a Black spirituality is nurtured and offered as something of a defence against the more harmful effects of conservative Eurocentric theology. This idea is developed more fully in subsequent chapters.

[17] 'White Led Church' was avoided as a term primarily because it was considered that this would not allow sufficient acknowledgement of the slowly increasing number of Black leaders at local and national level amongst these Church groups. Hence, in spite of the fact that centralised power in the traditional denominations remains within White, British hands, to use the term White- Led would somehow negate the efforts of individual African Caribbean men and women in breaking through this power base.

For ideological reasons the term 'Mainstream British Church' was also rejected as a suitable description of the non Black Led denominations since it implies a marginality of BLC in terms of religious experience in Britain which would, in reality, be misleading. See for example, D. Sutcliff and C. Tomlin, *The Black Churches* in D. Sutcliff and A. Wong (eds.) **The Language of the Black Experience,** (Basic Blackwell, 1986) pgs. 15-30. Iain Macrobert in Badham, op. cit. pg. 119 argues that "by the year 2000...the majority of Christians will belong not to the historic denominations...they will be members of the indigenised, oral narrative Pentecostal-type churches." Kenneth Leech; **Struggle in Babylon**, (Sheldon Press, SPCK, 1988) agrees with this sentiment:

> The Christianity of the future will not be predominantly a white person's religion. It is very likely that the future of Christianity in Britain will lie to a great extent with the black Christians. pg. 124.

[18] Benjamin Gibbs, **Freedom and Liberation**, (Sussex University Press, 1976) pg. 10.

[19] Ibid, pg. 15.

[20] Paulo Freire, **Pedagogy of the Oppressed**, (Penguin, 1972).

[21] Ibid pg. 28.

[22] Ibid, pg. 52.

[23] Black, here, is used in its political sense to cover the expressions of resistance from predominantly Asian and African Caribbean, but also other 'racial' or 'ethnic' minorities in British society although this term has increasingly come to be rejected by specific groups and academic writers. See for example Tariq Modood, *The End of Hegemony: The Concept of 'Black' and British Asians* in John Rex and Beatrice Drury (eds.) **Ethnic Mobilisation in a Multicultural Europe** (Ashgate Publishing Co. 1994).

[24]The intention here is to catalogue them in order to identify them, rather than to attempt any in-depth description or analysis of the areas. Elements raised by some of these approaches will necessarily be drawn on further as part of the examination of the roles of passive and active radicalism.

[25] E.g. Sivanandan, **A Different Hunger: Writings on Black Resistance**, (Pluto Press, 1982) and **Communities of Resistance: Writings on Black Struggles for Socialism**, (Verso, 1990).

[26] E.g. Ron Ramdin, **The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain**. (Gower Publishing Company, 1987).

[27] A useful bibliography of Hall's work is provided in Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen. op cit, pgs. 504-513.

[28] Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, **The Empire Strikes Back, Race and racism in 70s Britain**, (Routledge, 1982). The work was itself influenced by the ideas of Stuart Hall.

[29]Stephen Small, **Racialised Barriers, The Black Experience in the United States and England in the 1980s**, (Routledge, 1994).

[30] Bryan, Dadzie & Scafe, **The Heart of The Race, Black Women's Lives in Britain**, (Virago, 1985).

[31]Hazel Carby, *White Woman Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood*, in Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, op .cit.

[32] Delia Jarrett-Macauley (ed.) **Reconstructing Womanhood, Reconstructing Feminism, Writings on Black Women**, (Routledge, 1996).

[33] See for example Kabina Mercer, **Welcome to the Jungle; New Positions in Black Cultural Studies**, (Routledge, 1994).

[34] For example the annual Rites of Passage conference in Manchester, organised as an Afrocentric conference for the examination of the 'Education of the Black Child'. Also, African Liberation Day which is a Pan African Congress Movement event which takes place in London and Birmingham annually.

[35] See for example articles such as *Who Are We? Going Home with no Illusions,* and *Lets Make a Slave* in **The Alarm** (Issue no. 7 July 1994).

[36]For example the work of Aswaad, Steel Pulse, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Benjamin Zephania.

[37] There has been an increase in African Caribbean recruits to the over 900 mosques in Britain which some have seen as a source of political mobilisation. See **The Voice** (Dec. 24th 1991) which reported Islam to be the fastest growing religion in Britain. The nationalist, Nation of Islam movement has also risen in popularity amongst, in particular, young African Caribbeans. The Nation of Islam's **The Final Call** newspaper provides a further space for the spiritual interpretation of liberation amongst Black communities in Britain.

[38]Very much linked to the rise of Afrocentric movements and philosophies in Britain, is the development of African-centred spiritual belief systems which look to, in particular, West African traditional religions and Kemetic (Egyptian) spiritual systems for their inspiration. The term 'neo-African' then is used to suggest a new African American and African Caribbean interpretation and/or manifestation of ancient African beliefs and practices. Amongst these 'neo-faiths' can be included the American derived Ausar Auset society.

[39] John Rex and S. Tomlinson, **Colonial Immigrants in a British City**, (Routledge and Keagan Paul, 1979) and Robert Miles, **Racism**, (Routledge, 1989).

[40] See for example Solomos and Back, **Racism and Society**, (Macmillan Press, 1996) pg. 11.

[41] Ibid, pgs. 16-22 also D.T. Goldberg (ed.) **Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader**, (Oxford Blackwell, 1994).

[42] See for example, Peter Fryer, **Staying Power, A History of Black People in Britain**, (Pluto Press, 1984) and Solomos and Back, op. cit, chapter 2.

[43] Clifford Hill, **Black Churches: West Indian and African Sects in Britain** (Community and Race Relations Unit of the British Council of Churches, 1971) pg. 9.

[44] Ramdin, op. cit, argues that by 1970, the NTCG, one of the largest of the BLC denominations, was "a small proportion of the vast majority of working class West Indians in Britain, who were far-removed from a 'good standard of living and prosperity.' Pg. 445. There has been little work done, since Hill, on the economic status of members within the Churches, however, evidence from this study does suggest that they contain a high proportion of low and high professional workers and university graduates. This is supported by Selwyn Arnold, *The Voice Interview,* **The Voice** (December 24, 1991) pg. 13.

[45] Hill, as cited in Ramdin, op. cit, pg. 447.

[46] See for example Solomos and Back, op. cit, chapter 8.

[47] See Ramdin, ibid, pg. 448. The notion of an 'inclusive' community where concerns of race are not superseded by those of class is a central argument in the work of Paul Gilroy in **There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack** (Hutchinson, 1987).

[48] The statistics for discrimination in housing and employment are detailed in numerous PSI surveys. See for example. Priscilla Annamanthodo: **Racism in Britain: Guidance for CVS and Other Local Development Agencies**, (Councils for Voluntary Service national Association, 1987). Differential educational achievement is outlined in the Rampton Committee of Inquiry set up by the Department of Education and Science in 1979 to look at the education of 'ethnic minority' children. This was followed by the 1985 Swann Report *Education for All.* These concerns are outlined too in M. Stone, **The Education of the Black Child in Britain: The Myth of Multi-Cultural Education**, (Fontana, 1981) and B. Coard, **How the West Indian Child is Made Educationally Subnormal in the British School System**, (New Beacon Books, 1971). More recently the concern in education has focused on the rate of male exclusions from schools.

[49] See Bob Carter, Clive Harris and Shirley Joshi, *The 1951-55 Conservative Government and the Racialisation of Black Immigration* in Winston James and Clive Harris, **Inside Babylon, The Caribbean Diaspora in Britain**, (Verso, 1993) pgs. 57-8.

[50] See for example Peter Fryer, op. cit. pgs. 391-5. Also Paul Gilroy, *Police and Thieves* in Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, op. cit.

[51] See Errol Francis, *Psychiatric Racism and Social Police: Black People and the Psychiatric Services* in James and Harris, op. cit.

[52] Martin Barker, **The New Racism** (Junction Books, 1981) and CCCS, op. cit.

[53] See essays by Lawrence in CCCS, op. cit.

[54] Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe, op. cit. Also see essays by Marshall, Cheney, Alexander and Charles and Mama in Delia Jarrett-Macauley (ed.), op. cit. Also by Claudette Williams, in James and Harris, op. cit.

[55]James H. Cone, **God of the Oppressed**, (Seabury Press, 1975) pg. 39.

[56] The concept of different levels of theology will be explored further in the second chapter.

[57] A term used by Gustavo Gutierrez. See Robert McAfee Brown in his book **Gustavo Gutierrez; An Introduction to Liberation Theology**, (Orbis Books, 1990). The concept is, although used in the singular, meant to represent a plurality and is therefore representative of a range of Western theological traditions. As subsequent chapters will explore, the characteristics of dominant theology are as much present in Pentecostal fundamentalism as in traditional 'High' Anglicanism.

[58]See for example George Mosse, **Towards The Final Solution: A History of European Racism**, (Dent, 1976).

[59]Robert E. Hood, **Must God Remain Greek? Afro Cultures and God-Talk**, (Fortress Press, 1990).

[60]For example J. Beckford, **The Changing Face of Religion**, (Sage Publications, 1989) points out that the concerns of the early social scientists were taken up with the implications of the new role for religion in the modern world; "the dominant questions were therefore about the fate of religion in an increasingly urbanised world of formal organisations, rational work disciplines...administration." pg. 1.

[61] For example see Peter Beyer, **Religion and Globalization**, (Sage Publications, 1994) pgs. 70-77.

[62] Also known as a Theology of Hope. See Rosini Gibellini, **The Liberation Theology Debate**, (SCM Press, 1987) pg. 16.

[63] Metz, as cited in Brown, op. cit, pg. 88.

[64]For example Bennetta Jules-Rosette, *The Sacred in African New Religions* in Beckford, op. cit, argues that it is a mistake to impose Western religious labels and identities onto African religious processes (pg. 150). Gutierrez also raises this point in relation to Latin America. (Brown, op. cit, pg. 89) Brown, himself argues that "those who follow Metz with his new political theology must be ready to engage in more robust critique of advanced capitalist society, and not let themselves be seduced into too narrow an ecclesiastical framework." pg. 89.

[65] Ibid, pg. 91 .

[66]Boff and Boff, op. cit, pg. 16.

[67]The concept is defined and explored only briefly here since it will form the greater focus of chapter two.

[68] See for example Deane William Ferm, **Third World Liberation Theologies an Introductory Survey**, (Orbis Book 1986) pg. 1.

[69]Theo Witvliet, **A Place in the Sun: An Introduction to Liberation Theology in the Third World**, (SCM, 1985) pg. 26.

[70] Ibid.

CHAPTER TWO: THEOLOGIES OF LIBERATION IN CONTEXT

> ***Christianity can no longer be dismissed as the opium of the people, nor can it be seen as merely fostering an attitude of critique: it has now become an active commitment to liberation.***[1]

The previous chapter has described Liberation Theology as a reaction against the focus of 'dominant' theology and a response to the issues of oppression within the contexts of individual groups, communities and societies. This chapter seeks to expand this focus on the meaning of liberation in theology by exploring its application in seven different contexts. The first five of these will highlight some of the concerns which emerge from formally articulated Liberation Theologies whilst the latter two will examine the theological interpretations of liberation at a popular or 'folk' level. Through such an exercise a comprehensive understanding will emerge; not of Liberation Theology in its entire and complex condition, since this is beyond the scope of this chapter, but of significant developments emerging within specific contexts. This will illustrate a number of key features or conditions of Liberation Theology that will, in turn, provide a vital means through which its development by the BLC can be analysed and assessed. The survey of key developments in theologies of liberation, then, will generate a series of qualifying criteria that will either support or raise questions about the existence and/or effectiveness of the BLC's interpretation of liberation in Britain.

The distinction made above between academic theology and 'folk' theology is a significant one which has relevance both for the paradigms being explored here and for the research carried out on the BLC in Britain. The first term describes theological expression at a formal, theoretical and analytical level whilst the

latter refers to a popular manifestation of theology through pastors and their congregations. Whilst the first may be delivered through conference papers and academic texts the second is mediated through sermons, worship services, community and church auxiliaries.

Boff and Boff[2] draw a further distinction between this last manifestation of theology. They identify *professional, pastoral and popular* levels, all of which work together to form a comprehensive interpretation and application of liberation through theology within a given context. They liken this relationship to the one existing between the root, trunk and branches of a tree:

> Those who see only professional theologians at work in it see only the branches of the tree. They fail to see the trunk, which is the thinking of priests and other pastoral ministers, let alone the roots beneath the soil that hold the whole tree - trunk and branches- in place. The roots are the practical living and thinking - though submerged and anonymous - going on in tens of thousands of base communities living out their faith and thinking it in a liberating key.[3]

His analysis is extremely useful firstly in that it recognises that theology is articulated differently by different spheres of the Church and secondly, in that he identifies an important harmony that functions amongst these different vocal expressions in spite of the fact that they draw on different sources.

The separating out of these sources and the methods which are used to draw upon them is an essential pre-requisite for engaging in the work of this chapter since it will be necessary to determine at which level comparison is being made between the theologies of the BLC and those of Latin America, Africa, North America and the Caribbean. For example, Boff and Boff, in their model of the three levels of Liberation Theology, describe the chief method of the

professional theologians as being "socio-analytical, hermeneutical, and theoretico-practical", whilst the pastoral theologian utilises the actions of "seeing, judging and acting" and the popular theologian engages in "confrontation: the gospel and life."[4] When making sense of Liberation Theology, therefore, an attempt at identifying the qualities of a professional Latin American approach and applying them to a pastoral or popular British context would obviously result in misleading conclusions since a comparison of like with like is not being made. This point becomes even more pertinent when we examine the style of discourse represented by the three levels. Once again as described by Boff and Boff, these range from a "diffuse and capillary, almost spontaneous" popular manifestation of ideas, to a pastoral style which is "organically related to practice" and a professional approach which is "detailed and vigorous."[5] Whilst it is apparent that each of the above styles seek to serve the interests of Liberation Theology in their own way, it is nonetheless clear that their approaches are quite distinct and do not make for easy or effective comparison. It is important, then to clarify the precise way in which the models represented in this chapter are intended to apply to the institution of the BLC in Britain.

In the first place it should be observed that the interpretations of Liberation Theology described in the first five international paradigms outlined below, relate predominantly, although not exclusively, to that level of theology previously described as professional in that it represents the views and approaches articulated through academic means: through the seminaries, conferences, books and articles of these communities in question. The priority concern of this study, however, is to determine to what extent the individual members,

congregations, pastors, leaders and elders of the BLC have actually created and made use of a Theology of Liberation. Hence the emphasis, as concerns the British context, is on the expressions of popular and pastoral theology.[6] Although this may initially appear to present a problem, the intention, here, is not to attempt a direct comparison with the modes of operation of the various models as if like were being compared with like. Rather the insights which emerge from the paradigms will enable an accumulation of identified processes which are key to an understanding of Liberation Theology. It is through this that an evaluation of the BLC in Britain can be conducted.

A final point for consideration before embarking on the exercise of this chapter is the issue of context and the theologies of liberation to be explored here. Liberation Theology is essentially contextual theology and as such is rooted in the specific geographical, cultural, political and social needs of the country or community within which it is practised. In so doing, not only does it distance itself from those methods of 'doing' theology which have been handed down from external bodies but it also takes on its own particular contextual emphasis which manifests itself in one of two categories. The first, which focuses on issues of identity and change has been described, by Schreiter[7] as 'ethnographic approaches' and is represented here, most particularly, by the views of Black Theology in North America. The second, Schreiter puts into the category of 'liberation approaches' and describes as focusing on "oppression and social ills [and] the need for social change."[8] This latter approach has become, perhaps, most synonymous with the theological movements of Latin America, also explored in this chapter. In spite of their particular emphases, what both of these

this is possible, the process may be stunted by the imposition of Western theological methodology.[10]

In as much as the contextual examples used within this chapter attempt to assert a new way of overcoming the cultural limitations of colonial, translation and adoptive methods, they can all be described as Liberation Theologies. This is despite the fact that, being contextual, they each have created their own unique focus which serves to define and shape their relative areas of concern.

In summary then, these international paradigms of Liberation Theology will be used with the following understanding. Firstly, they will be recognised as emanating from a professional or academic manifestation of theology which interacts with the expression of liberation and theology in a fashion which is essentially different from that of the popular and pastoral theology of the BLC in Britain. Secondly it should be noted that in spite of this difference in approach, these international models have nonetheless been selected as providing valuable insight into the nature of Liberation Theology since, as Boff and Boff have described, a professionally articulated theology of liberation is very closely connected to the trunk and roots of pastoral and popular theology. Finally, the predominantly professionally articulated models are to be joined by two international paradigms which seek to explore the extent to which African Caribbean Christian expression has confronted issues of liberation and theology on a popular and pastoral level. These models, it is hoped, will compliment the approaches adopted by the professional/academic models.

Models of Liberation in Context

1. Latin America: Liberation Theology

Liberation Theology in Latin America has developed out of a history of Western spiritual, economic and political imperialism which began with Christopher Columbus' invasion of the Americas in 1492 and has continued with American economic dominance in the twentieth century. The formal foundation of the movement at its professional level is usually connected to the Vatican II and Medellin Conferences of the 1960s in which the roles and responsibilities that the Church should adopt towards the poor and dispossessed of Latin America first began to be articulated and defined.

It has already been noted that Liberation Theology represents a fresh approach to carrying out theological thought and action. Undergirding this entire approach is the move from *non-believer* to *non-person.* That is to say, the primary concern of the founding fathers of Latin American Liberation Theology was to move from a focus on personal sin and separation from God through the alleged modern processes of secularization. This was to be replaced with an interpretation of the Christian message which had at its heart an understanding of displacement and alienation emanating from structural sin and a rejection of notions of secularization in favour of the more relevant terms of domination, dependence and imperialism. In approaching theology through an analysis of the structures of society, Liberation Theology in its Latin American context has inevitably become associated with Marxist thought and whilst its proponents have sought to highlight the limitations of this connection, it is nonetheless

embraced as one of several useful tools which can be borrowed from the social sciences.[11] As the social scientist Alistair Kee has observed:

> Liberation theology is not the application of traditional theology to a different agenda including exotic phenomena such as revolution. It is theology done through a completely different method, and this transformation has been in large part brought about by the application of certain insights from Marx.[12]

By far the most notable of these 'insights' is a social analysis which utilises theories of class and economic exploitation as its chief means of explaining and understanding oppression within the social world and which identifies the role of ideologies in maintaining the dominance of oppression within society. Like Marxist, liberation theologians seek, above all, to engage in liberational praxis that will address the 'true' needs of those who struggle against oppression. These needs are met not by simply recognising the causes of inequity or even by reflecting on these causes, but only by exposing the mechanism of oppression and engaging in activity to destroy it. Hence, "liberation comes not from understanding injustice but through bringing it to an end."[13]

This emphasis on critical reflection through historical placing is what enables its proponents to argue that Liberation Theology is "a new way of doing theology."[14] The starting point for this critical reflection is the active faith or spirituality of the Christian; in other words, its focus is upon the praxis of the believer who interacts within an oppressive reality. It then continues with further critical reflection which seeks to assess the initial act in the light of liberational change. As this second step is completed, so the cycle is able to repeat itself. The tools of analysis or critical appraisal, then, are drawn from the social sciences but the

point of reference, to which these tools are ultimately responsible, is the faith of the believer and the gospel of liberation as interpreted from the scriptures and a Christological reading of the text:

> The theology of liberation therefore means critical reflection on human praxis (of human beings generally and Christians in particular) in the light of the praxis of Jesus and the demands of the faith.[15]

Whilst Liberation Theology is certainly not a monolithic entity in Latin America, one of the principle concerns of nearly all of its expressions is the liberation of the economically poor and, as such, it has sometimes been described as a 'theology from the underside of history'.[16] This is the major point of departure for liberationists in that they seek to bring all methods and theories under the dominion of the poor in their day to day partnership with God as they seek to work out their own salvation through liberation in a social context.

A key example of this has been the theological response to the economic theory of development which has interpreted the condition of poverty experienced by certain 'third world' countries as being a result of their underdeveloped status. According to this view the only solution to this problem is an importation of aid which will bring these nations up to the evolved status of the 'developed', 'first' world. Basing their own interpretation on the experiences and realities of the poor, Liberation theologians have sought to contradict this approach by arguing that underdevelopment is not an accidental result of backwardness but rather is a direct result of the development of those countries which have sought to make the 'third world' dependent on their aid; dependence rather than underdevelopment, therefore, is the real issue if the situation is analysed from

the underside of history. Liberation, rather than development, is the key to its solution.[17]

In as much that theology must be utilised in solidarity with the poor, the Church must also be a sign and an instrument of the liberation of the poor:

> The ecclesiology of liberation has developed the image of the church of the poor, to be understood not only in the sense that it must be a poor church in order to fulfil its mission, nor mainly in the sense that the church must be preoccupied with the poor and be for the poor, but in the sense that it must understand itself and act from the poor.[18]

Boff and Boff, in fact, suggest five main reasons why this should be the case. These fall into the categories of Christological, eschatological, apostolic, theological and ecclesiological motivations.[19] They demonstrate the way in which the Biblical text, in its portrayal of the end times and through the words and actions of God, Christ and the early Church clearly identified not just the importance, but the vital necessity of alignment with and support of the poor, disenfranchised and oppressed; the widowed, the orphaned, the lame, etc. The responsibility of the Church, therefore, is an all encompassing one since the process of liberation is not only ongoing but extensive in its areas of concern. Liberation must address itself, according to Gutierrez to three principle concerns: (1) to conditions of social, political and economic oppression (2) to the need the oppressed have of historical autonomy, and (3) to "emancipation from sin and the acceptance of new life in Christ."[20] Only when all three conditions are addressed in circumstances in which the poor have been allowed to vocalise their needs and lead the way through to their liberty, can authentic Liberation Theology be said to have taken place. In this way it can be seen that the role of

theology within a tradition of liberation is to respond to human conditions of suffering by maintaining contact with, and providing a forum for, the oppressed. To return to the question of methodology, Boff and Boff have articulated three "mediations" which they consider to be suitable ways of carrying out Liberation Theology. The first of these is socio-analytical mediation and has the task of exploring the causes of oppression of the poor:

> "Liberation" means liberation from oppression. Therefore, liberation theology has to begin by informing itself about the actual conditions in which the oppressed live, the various forms of oppression they may suffer.[21]

The means by which this is done returns attention to the connection of Liberation Theology with the social sciences since it is in seeking to understand and explain the mechanisms of oppression that the tools of social science, in particular, sociology, are most often applied. Boff and Boff identify empirical, functional and dialectical explanations but it is the last of these which Liberation Theology has found the most appropriate for explaining material reality from the underside of history. Within this tradition, the main source of oppression in Latin America is identified as being poverty. This, in turn, is seen as emanating from the deliberate organisation of society in such a way that the exploitation of the producers of wealth, the workers, inevitably takes place at the hands of the receivers of wealth, the companies, multi-nationals etc. Moreover, that yet others are excluded from the process of production altogether and rendered unemployable and relegated to the margins of society. In other words, the dialectical explanation urges a classical Marxist analysis and critique of Latin

American society as essentially capitalist and therefore exploitative and oppressive.

The dialectical approach also identifies the pernicious effects of ideology in maintaining the status quo and upholds the need to confront and destroy such ideological sources even when, or perhaps especially when, they originate from within the official Church. This has led to a somewhat uneasy relationship between the official Catholic Church and the proponents of Liberation Theology, in spite of the fact that the Church had given a degree of sanction to the ideas that were later to develop into the praxis of Liberational Theology.[22] This commitment to work against destructive and oppressive hegemonic structures means that, like classical Marxism, the dialectic medium of liberation also advocates a revolutionary transformation of society as the only real possible hope to end the structural system of oppression and disadvantage.

The second 'mediation' identified by Boff and Boff involves the application of hermeneutical considerations; that is to say, it seeks to return to a theological medium in order to understand how the Biblical text can enhance understanding of the experience of oppression:

> The liberation theologian goes to the scriptures bearing the whole weight of the problems, sorrows, and hopes of the poor, seeking light and inspiration from the divine word. This is a new way of reading the Bible: the hermeneutics of liberation.[23]

In the process of so doing it is important to note that what is sought here is a holistic understanding of the poor, one that incorporates their wider aspirations as human beings as well as their needs as members of an oppressed community. The search for Biblical interpretation of the context of the poor is

done in the understanding that to focus on them exclusively as 'the poor' without recognition of their wider spiritual needs, would be to dehumanise them further and deny the fact that the poor themselves need to be challenged out of their own complacency. Hence an active interpretation of Scripture is encouraged that will not only lead to "change in history (revolution)" but also to "individual change (conversion)".[24] This interpretation will serve, where appropriate, to question, strengthen or challenge the social teachings of the official Church and to bring them in line with the needs and conditions of the local context.

The final mediation is a 'practical' one which relates how the Church governed by liberational ideals is one which is firmly grounded in the day to day necessities of change, action and progress within a wider background of faith-inspired contemplation and reflection. A liberational church, therefore, is one which is involved in the constant process of transforming individuals within the institution and the wider community outside of the institution. The methods of action employed by the church are ones which operate on all appropriate levels and thereby incorporate professional, pastoral and popular manifestations of interpretation and practice. Such a policy ensures that a vibrant and ongoing radical praxis is maintained and the Church is ensured of the necessary inspiration and discipline in order to achieve its end goal.

These complementary forces of inspiration and discipline are best captured by the concepts of prophecy and priesthood which are also to be understood as key to all three mediations as described above. The first reveals the way in which the liberational Church has a responsibility to speak out on issues of oppression within its own boundaries and in society. It needs, in effect, to be a

mouthpiece for and of the poor and dispossessed. Within a liberational context, it is the prophetic voice of the Church that recognises the necessity of drawing upon whatever sociological or economic tools are necessary in order to secure the liberation of the oppressed. It is the socially inspired political vision of the Church. The role of priest, however serves to counterbalance this prophetic function by allowing space for reflection in the light of faith and thereby ensuring that when the Church speaks out, it does so with authenticity and the legitimacy of the gospel and Christian faith. Within its priestly context, then, the people of God nurture their understanding and appreciation of God's love for them and their struggle. Since this process is realised through the communal ritual and celebration of the Church, the priestly role can also be identified as the spirituality of the Church. Hence both prophecy (theology in social analysis) and priesthood (spirituality in reflection) serve to create a context of active theological liberation:

> Without the prophetic dimension, the language of contemplation is in danger of having no grip on the history in which God acts and in which we meet God. Without the [contemplative] dimension the language of prophecy can narrow its vision and weaken its perception of the God who makes all things new.[25]

The contemplative or spiritual dimension, then, represents a new kind of spirituality. Not only is it "located in the midst of the world's turmoil rather than in a safe haven of retreat"[26] but in being so it is inextricably intertwined with the considerations of prophecy. It prepares the ground so that effective and vibrant prophecy can take root and flourish.

Gutierrez[27] has identified five characteristics of what might be called radical spirituality. These are: (1) "Conversion: A Requirement for Solidarity" (2) "Grace : The Power for Action" (3) "Joy: Victory over Suffering" (4) "Spiritual Childhood: A Requirement for Commitment to the poor" and (5) "Community: Out of Solitude." Together these elements forge a very practical means by which a dynamic spiritual reality can be created through the collective identity and commitment of the oppressed and those who wish to work towards their liberation. Gutierrez' principles begin to reclaim spirituality as active methodology so that, when combined with the ministry of priesthood, a powerful symbiotic relationship may be enacted.

It is not intended that Latin American Liberation Theology should be presented here as a single expression without diversity or, indeed, without its critics. In terms of the former consideration, its theologians represent a wide spectrum of emphases ranging from those who seek to focus on Biblical hermeneutics[28] to those who are deeply entrenched within a Marxist tradition.[29] The tradition represents predominantly Catholic theologians but also includes writers from a Protestant tradition.[30] It is also true to say that whilst the main tradition of contextual theology in Latin America follows the liberational model, there are those who have sought to explore elements of cultural identity within this broader development.[31]

Liberation Theology has, moreover, had its fair share of critics, most notoriously, because of its explicit connections with Marxist theory but also for a range of factors which stem from this. Whilst it is not necessary at this point to attempt a lengthy exploration of these criticisms or of Liberation Theologians' responses to

them, briefly outlined they can be identified as the problems raised by what some have described as a dehumanizing of the gospel and a politicizing of an essentially spiritual experience. Some have also criticised the emphasis on an analogy of class exploitation at the expense of other types of oppression: in particular, gender and race.[32] Another significant criticism has been the connection of theologies of liberation with acts of, or in fact, legacies of violence which in some parts of Central America have reached excessive proportions. Theologians have attempted to address this last problem through the working out of an even more contextual 'theology of life.'[33]

In summary, Liberation Theology is articulated in Latin America in such a way as to meet the contextual needs of the oppressed. It has developed its own methodology established on a praxis of critical reflection and delivered through the principles of a localised and communal prophetic and priestly ministry. Whilst this overview has focused on some of the theories of liberation as expressed at the professional level of articulation, it should also be noted that liberation is worked out daily through a growing network of house fellowships in which popular and pastoral liberation is explored, created and experienced:

> The communities are not political cells but they transform the consciousness of the people who participate, assisting them to see through the ideology of domination and enabling them to avoid repeating the pattern of oppression.[34]

Moreover, as is revealed in the above quotation, the theologies of liberation which are articulated at these latter two levels are most keenly aligned with a hermeneutical tradition, mediated through the methodology of a radical spirituality.

2. North America: Black Theology of Liberation

The Black Theology of liberation development in North America, like its Latin American counterpart is a diverse movement represented by a range of different emphases and methodological approaches. For the greater part, it falls into the category of contextual theology described earlier by Schreiter as ethnographic approaches in that it lays emphasis on identity and the need for social change. Like Latin American theology, Black Theology claims its roots in the centuries-old struggle against oppression: in this case, internal colonialism and slavery. However, it has been represented as a movement in text, more recently from the 1960s. The impetus for this contemporary development has at least two key sources. One is the Civil Rights movement of predominantly the American South in the 1950s, the other is the Black Power movement, commencing in the 1960s, which sprung up predominantly in the urban north. These movements have come to be symbolised respectively by the personalities and leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King Jnr. and Malcolm X.

As has been well documented,[35] the Civil Rights movement, which rapidly expanded following the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955, was closely aligned with the activities of Black Churches and Church leaders of the South. It was also concerned with addressing social and economic issues through the raising of theological questions seeking to stimulate Black Christians to spiritually-inspired protest against injustice and to encourage White Christians to look again at their complacent response to the challenging truths of Biblical faith. Its inspired and prophetic leader, Martin Luther King was able to stimulate

commitment to the concerns of theological liberation from racism and oppression amongst both Black and White Christians, and, indeed, the American nation:

> No religious thinker has made a greater impact upon American culture and its churches than Martin King. He has communicated the Christian message of freedom more effectively, prophetically, and creatively than anyone in the United States before or after him. He was a liberation theologian before African-Americans and Latin Americans began to use the term to describe their reflections about God from the perspective of the poor.[36]

However, in spite of King's undoubted contribution to the field of liberational theory and methodology, his programme of resistance, which hinged upon the concept of non-violence and the end goal of integration into White American society, proved to be insufficient for the changing focus of the Black efforts towards liberation. By the mid 1960s, Black Power had begun to meet the needs of, in particular, the young, urban and often unchurched Blacks with whom Civil Rights had failed to engage. The Black youth of the North were not prepared to 'sit-in' for their freedom; rather, they took matters, quite literally into their own hands and a series of urban riots dominated the context of race relations in the middle years of the 1960s.

It was out of this latter development, and with the hope of counteracting the increasing alienation of Black Christian faith in an age that had tired of 'turning the other cheek', that Black clergymen began to rethink the connections between religion, resistance and Black empowerment. The term Black Theology was first used in text in 1969 by the theologian James Cone,[37] although it was used within an oral context before this. It was intended to represent a direct Christian parallel with, and empathy for, the secular development of Black

Power. Black Theology developed initially, not at the academic or professional levels but rather at the middle level of clergy from a range of backgrounds who came together to form an ecumenical and radical association that was eventually to become known as the National Conference of Black Churchmen (NCBC).

This development during the middle of the era of Black Power was to establish quite clearly the direction that Black Theology was to take in that, like its secular counterpart, it was an attempt to create a new and militant self-consciousness. An essential part of this self-consciousness was the recognition that theology was not, nor ever had been, colourless. Rather it should be seen as a direct reflection of community identity. It involved the recognition that White America had constructed an oppressive and racist "American Christ"[38] and set him up as a means of achieving its own exploitative ends. It was felt, therefore, that a theology which had provided the inspiration for, amongst other evils, the slavery of millions of African people and which continued to exploit and dehumanise those people through a policy of brutal segregationalism and denial of basic human (not to mention democratic) rights, was in dire need of deconstruction in the minds of the victims of this oppression.

This deconstruction was to involve the 'blackening' of God: the re-making of Him in the image of Black people. Its underlying precept was and is that God is actively interested in the condition of the oppressed individual and his/her community; therefore the response of the believer should be to live, move and have one's being within the Black revelation of God. Moreover, "the question, as Black Theology sees it, is not whether blacks believe in God, but whose

God?"[39] The originators of Black Theology advocated a reinterpretation of a long-standing White theology which had as its centre idol a White Christ figure who represented the interests of oppressors over the centuries.

Through this process of reinterpretation, it was felt that Black Theology in America would become a vital tool with which to attack the hypocrisy of the White churches and an effective vehicle for liberation amongst the Black community; in the church and in the 'world'. Indeed there would be no such distinction since Black Theology was intended to involve a radical reassessment of the responsibilities of the Church in the light of the requirements of Black liberational struggle.

The first priority, at least in the rhetoric of the NCBC, however, was not the Black Church in America, but rather the fight against racism in the White churches. This was reflected in the first official statement of the Conference, which identified the need for an equalising of power and conscience between Black and White Christians:

> The power of white men is corrupted because it meets little meaningful resistance from Negroes to temper it and keep white men from aping God. The conscience of black men is corrupted because, having no power to implement the demands of conscience, the concern for justice is transmuted into a distorted form of love, which, in the absence of justice, becomes chaotic self-surrender. [40]

Although the statement and, indeed, the views of the conference in general, represented a clear assertion of radical identity and confrontation it did not, as its critics have observed,[41] amount to an analytically comprised theological methodology that was able to withstand either the subsequent debate to emerge from White theologians or, perhaps more significantly, the practical demands of

the transition in Black Christian experience that its advocates desired. What it did do, however, was to begin a process which became significant for two key reasons. The first is that it authenticated a Black Christian experience, the existence of which had previously been denied or ignored. Secondly, it set a clear agenda for liberation that had implications which stretched beyond the limitations of its own rhetoric.

The criticisms raised by the early developments of Black Theology have been taken up by some of its key proponents as the movement has proceeded into the seminaries and universities of America. Its progression has seen a more systematic detailing of its function as a theological expression that seeks to both make sense of and direct the experiences of Black people as they engage in liberation:

> Theology cannot be indifferent to the importance of blackness by making some kind of existential leap beyond blackness to an undefined universalism. It must take seriously the questions which arise from black existence and not even try to answer white questions, questions coming from the lips of those who know oppressed existence only through abstract reflections.[42]

Part of this formalising of the rhetoric of the sixties has involved identifying Black Theology as contextual theology and therefore, highlighting, the Black experience as a legitimate and essential tool for doing theology. It has seen an important focus on the relevance of Black Theology for the Black Churches and on the need for tools of critical analysis and reflection to be utilised within an internal context. This has moved the scope of analysis beyond a critique of racist White Christians and into a broader reflection which, for example, draws attention to the oppressive and limiting forces within Black Churches; the rise of

conservative, middle class aspirations, the distancing of church leaders from their responsibilities to a wider Black community:

> The black church must re-assert its power to transform our neighbourhoods into communities. Our church possesses gospel power which must be translated into community power, for there can be no authentic community in a condition of powerlessness...The identification of black liberation with the material success of a few, physically and mentally severed from the black masses, makes mockery of the unity essential for the salvation of us all. Even the material good fortune of that few is poisoned by emptiness and isolation from the people's struggle without which the mission of Jesus Christ can be neither understood nor undertaken.[43]

The development of methods of analysis through the works of theologians such as Cone[44], Wilmore[45] and Roberts[46] has, included considerations of class. It has also begun to address concerns raised by gender (an issue that this chapter will return to at greater length.) Such a social-analytical approach has aligned Black Theology to its Latin American counterpart and through this route, to what one theologian has described as the ideological school of theology.[47] The methodology of Black Theology is founded on the identities of Black men and women as they relate to God through their historical experience of suffering. As such, it is a theology that relies very much on the historical unveiling of a Black narrative which it is then able to use as a hermeneutical tool through which to understand and apply Biblical text in a context of liberational praxis. This involves, for example, a focus on those scriptures which reveal God's liberating power, concern for justice and predilection for the plight of the oppressed. It also reveals a Christology which is centred around the concept of a suffering and liberating redeemer.[48] Whilst the focus on Black narrative and

suffering quite clearly suggests a special focus and priority of Black Theology it does not intend to rule out universal implications for liberation. In fact, it is considered that only when theology is fully contextual can it be successful in achieving its goal of a universal commitment to the end of oppression.

The paralleled and seemingly uncritical development of Black Theology alongside Black Power and movements of Black nationalism[49] has been a repeated source of criticism for Black Liberation Theology.[50] Cone has responded to this criticism partly through his insistence on the need for Black Theology to be heard by, and answerable to, the Black oppressed. It can also be seen in his assertion of the contextual nature of all theologies:

> Not only the questions which theologians ask but the answers given in their discourse about the gospel are limited by their social perceptions and thus largely a reflection of the material conditions of a given society. Theology arises out of life and thus reflects a people's struggle to create meaning in life.[51]

Nonetheless, the need for authentic theology to be universally appropriate is partly addressed through the concept of ecumenicalism. The Dutch theologian, Theo Witvliet, has suggested two main ways in which this is realised in Black Liberational Theology.[52] The first is through the initial and continued denominational diversity upon which Black Theology was developed and nurtured. It has represented the views of clergy and scholars from both the range of Black Church traditions and of White "mainstream" denominations of both Catholic and Protestant persuasions and of a range of nationalist and integrationist philosophies. Secondly, an international ecumenicalism has begun to be fostered which has seen a greater level of contact, dialogue and

subsequent appreciation of the conditions of other liberational groups in the 'third world' and of other marginalised sections within American society. Both of these connections have enhanced domestic praxis and ensured that Black Theology is neither monolithic or limited in its analysis of oppression and liberation.

3. The Caribbean: Emancipatory Theology[53]

Contextual theology emerging from the Caribbean has focused predominantly on the issues of poverty, unemployment and, like Latin America, 'development'. However, its historical struggle against slavery, colonialism and internalised oppression has meant that concerns of race and culture, and particularly identity, have also been an important part of the process of practical theology in the light of social analysis. Theologians of the Caribbean have tended to emphasise the uniqueness of the region in terms of several distinguishing features discussed below. Therefore, whilst the methodology of faith working in and through the historical realities of the oppressed is one which is shared with the liberation theologies of Latin and North America, the circumstances which direct faith emerge from a characteristically Caribbean backdrop. This creates a need for a specifically focused theological praxis which is a recurring theme in the works of Caribbean theologians.[54]

Kortright Davis' description of Caribbean theology as emancipatory rather than liberational begins the process of identifying the contextual shape and requirements of theology in the Caribbean. Davis has argued that the term liberation has been associated with "diversive, ideological and political concerns"

and has consequently lost its sharpness of meaning. It is, itself, in need of transformation:

> For those on the underside of history, the historically poor and oppressed, the notion of emancipation is more meaningful than the notion of liberation. It ushers in a deeper range of theological reflection and response than is usually offered in the varieties of contemporary theologies.[55]

For Davis, emancipation symbolises holistic expression of reclamation in Caribbean society.` Unlike the proclamation of Lincoln or the act of the British Parliament in 1834, emancipation through theology is not something given but rather something asserted and claimed by the oppressed in the light of their faith and in the knowledge that the act of liberation is divinely ordained. Here Davis suggests:

> It is an ongoing response to an authentic divine-human encounter, for no one can truly meet with God and still feel enslaved. Emancipation is therefore both a divine promise and a human project..."[56]

In its capacity as human project, Caribbean Emancipatory Theology is concerned with identifying and understanding the various trends within the region that have had an impact on the conditions of Caribbean peoples. Davis has described six crises areas which he believes fill this role. These are: persistent poverty, migration, cultural alienation, dependence, fragmentation in regional identity, and drug trafficking and abuse.[57] Several, if not all, of the above elements reflect a direct colonial legacy which has continued from the mid-twentieth century through a new dependency relationship on America. Moreover they are compounded by a degree of social pluralism which has

manifested itself in further forms of disadvantage. These include: a 'skinocracy' in which dark skinned peoples are disadvantaged socially, economically and educationally; classism, often manifested through skinocracy; and social contempt - what the theologian, Lewin Williams has described in terms of an inability to achieve self-actualization[58] and what Ashley Smith has identified as "a sense of inferiority both on the individual and corporate level, and a negative self-regard."[59]

These social, economic and political sources of disadvantage and oppression are all, in their own way, reflected in the theology of the region which, in terms of the Christian Church is also very much a legacy of domination. So much so, in fact that Watty describes the major currents in theology in the Caribbean as being "the theology of imposition on the one hand and imitation on the other." [60] Within the historical experience of the Caribbean the concept of the Christian God has been affected by the wider socio-economic and political landscape. It is therefore the task of Emancipatory Theology to de-colonize theology and to re-contextualize it in ways in which its history of colonialism and domination has not permitted.[61] As Smith has argued; "Caribbean Theology attempts to clear the name of the God of the Bible so that Christianity can be preserved in its essence in the region...[it] seeks to save that which is authentic in Christianity from the scandal of elitism and Eurocentrism...[it] aims at producing a new Caribbean person with a more healthy self-concept."[62] The problem faced by Caribbean Emancipatory theologians is that if this contextualising process is to be effective and successful - if it is to break away from the theological and socio-historical habit of imitation - then it must utilise home grown methods. It must be wary of

importing liberational theories from Latin America or from North America in the form of Black Theology.[63]

Emancipatory Theology in the Caribbean is still very much in the early stages of formation and articulation. Those who have taken up the task of participating in this process have sought to overcome the difficulties raised by the contextualisation issue through emphasising the need for the following prerequisites for the creation and maintenance of an active and productive Emancipatory Theology.

Firstly, Emancipatory Theology must recognise its primary task as working to undermine the ubiquitous and pernicious impact of what Williams has described as "missio-colonial misevangelization."[64] In order to do so it must apply a critical praxis to its own historical development. It must, as Watty has argued, learn to "speak honestly and consistently out of a particular situation."[65] Moreover, as has already been argued, it is also necessary to draw on its own internal sources in order to assist it in this task. In this way, in fact, Emancipatory Theology in the Caribbean is a theology that needs to give formal acknowledgement, respect and full consideration to the 'folk' or 'indigenous' religious traditions of the Caribbean; several of which are given clandestine endorsement by many of the region's Christians.[66]

Secondly, in its efforts to enter into self-actualization, Emancipatory Theology needs to address itself to the formation of a community identity that will redress the influences of disintegration. Yet this formation needs to be constructed in the understanding that "liberation and power-seeking are fundamentally contradictory."[67] Therefore the purpose of re-asserting a communal identity is

not to replace one power structure with another of an equal composition but rather to create "a new community, a counter-community, an anti-power, by which all forms of oppression are exposed and neutralized and from which all forms of oppression are exorcised."[68]

Attempts at combating the isolationism of the region should begin by tackling the stringent denominationalism amongst the churches:

> When churches begin to overcome their divisions which they did not create then I shall know that theology is indeed making a contribution to the de-colonization process and to the healing of our people."[69]

This process has been attempted through several key organisations within the region. This includes, in particular, the Caribbean Conference of Churches, formed in 1973 and representing all four major language groups within the Caribbean, and the main theological training institution, United Theological College of the West Indies, situated in Mona, Jamaica. The latter organisation engages in the theological training of ten of the larger denominations of the region and as such is the largest organisation of its type in the Caribbean. One of the principle aims of the college is to promote the integration of a unified spiritual leadership within society:

> We want to emphasise the responsibility of church leaders to take their rightful place amongst other leaders, fashioning our destiny as a region, and in the process of fashioning, interpreting the past as we link our past to our future.[70]

It is also significant to observe that the concept of community and regional identity which the college wishes to nurture, not only takes into consideration the common historical, economic and social features shared by the people who

currently live in the Caribbean, but also its close association with those who have become part of the Caribbean diaspora in America and Europe.

The effort at partnership and removal of denominational hindrances is also attempted at a national level; demonstrated by, for example, the Jamaican Council of Churches.[71] Whilst each of these developments stand as testimony to the process of emancipation, ecumenical organisations in themselves are not sufficient for a full praxis of emancipation since, as Davis has pointed out, " the most urgent theological task for the Caribbean now is not to think and talk ourselves into new ways of acting but, rather, to act ourselves into new ways of thinking."[72]

A third prerequisite for Emancipatory Theology, comes from what Davis has articulated as elements of worship, celebration and praise. Otherwise stated, there is a vital requirement for an Emancipatory Theology to be founded upon a spirituality of resistance. Moreover, when this is achieved its participants will also be fulfilling a further aspect of emancipation since the "Christian life of praise" is already "deeply rooted in the Caribbean religious experience."[73] Out of this worship experience comes a fourth characteristic for the developing theology and the final one to be considered here. This is that the expression of worship and the hermeneutics of faith must emanate from the Black narrative. Not only must the methods of theology be Caribbean but the content of the theology must draw from the experiences of suffering and resistance within the Caribbean past and present. In so doing it can begin to reflect the efforts of the oppressed, the de-humanized and the impoverished, to retain dignity and work towards their own emancipation through the inspiration of their faith.

4. Africa: African Liberation Theology

The development of theologies of liberation in Africa is perhaps more diverse than in any of the other contexts considered here since the vastness and diversity of the continent has, quite naturally, been reflected in the theological interests of the various regions. Consequently contextual theology in the form of ethnographical and liberational emphases have been explored as responses to the historical legacies and contemporary conditions most suited to local needs. Africa is also uniquè in the fact that, whilst a great part of its historical legacy of oppression is represented by its colonial links with Europe and with missionary Christianity, it has, in its northern region, been a host to the very early, pre-European expressions of Christianity. It is perhaps because of its unique placing that Liberation theologians in Africa have been particularly wary of uncritical acceptance of both Black American and Latin American theologies.

Within its African context, in fact, liberation has often created a range of contradictions. For example between those who seek to advocate an increased indigenization of the Christian experience as the key to counteracting external and oppressive influences, and those who see such measures as largely insular and irrelevant, diverting attention and energy from the need to tackle more pressing economic, political and race-related concerns. Nonetheless, there is a focal point of unity in the creation of an African theology. That is, as one writer has put it, " the African's salvation and liberation"[74] and beyond this, the need to make use of those home-grown cultural resources that will serve to actualise such a liberation. Africa's current oppressive context stems, not only from the consequences of a Euro-colonial past but also from a recent history and current

experience of foreign aid, multi-national development, internal military opportunism, neo-colonialism as well as social and political intervention from each of the major powers and global ideological influences.[75] Until recently, too, it was also home to extreme racial segregation and apartheid.

The complex nature of the problems of oppression and the attempts to overcome them means that the most significant quality of a theological response must be its ability to be, as Oduyoye has argued, dialogical:[76] that is, communicating, not only with the victims of Africa's colonial and neo-colonial legacy but also with those who are committed to ways of overcoming it from both within and outside of the church. This process of dialogical theology has been demonstrated by the involvement of some of Africa's theologians in the Pan-African conference of Third World theologians which took place in Accra, Ghana, in 1977. It is also evidenced in the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) which has continued to articulate the concerns of theologians in Asia, Africa and South America since its inception in 1976. Apart from asserting their task as the creation of a theology which "arises from and is accountable to African people",[77] the theologians present at this first event were also able to explore appropriate ways of creating and implementing such a theology. In so doing, they identified three significant features of African theology. The first is that it should be contextual, and thereby concerned with the deliverance of Africa from the cultural domination of alien nations. Secondly, it should be liberational, addressing itself to the requirements of political, social and economic struggle. Finally, attention was also paid to the need for an African theology to give regard to the emancipatory needs of women in Africa,

and also to the role they have played in the historical process of resistance. In 1986, EATWOT met in Mexico. Here the discussion on Theological requirements for Africa were continued and extended, particularly with an emphasis on issues of indigenization. In addition to the considerations of contextual social analysis, the specific methodology of liberation was explored, in particular within the African context.[78]

The discussion of context, once again, encouraged the development of an historical approach which not only traced five centuries of Western dominance but also sought to end its perpetuation by rejecting Western methods and systems of social analysis, in particular both Capitalism and Marxism. It recognised, too, the existence of a complex structure of "cultural pauperization"[79] which needed to be eliminated.

With regards to the sources and foundation of African contextual theology, the conference report pointed to the centrality of scripture as a foundational tool which Liberation theologians need to interpret in the light of African realities. This process, it stated, needs to be accompanied by a commitment to inculturation, considered as "a living experience of the gospel in an African way, by African people before God."[80] The conceptual tools required for such a methodology were described by the report as emanating from the African world view - that is from the key spiritual and cosmological principles that have been drawn out and analysed in the works of theologians such as Mbiti, Sanneh and others.[81] African Theology, which places emphasis on the indigenisation of religion, clearly focuses on the cultural needs of oppressed Africa. Nonetheless, its proponents lay claim to being part of an essential liberational process since,

as Mosala has argued; "Culture is not only the outcome of a people's history. It is a determinant of that history. To want to liberate people is to desire to restore them to the centre of the historical process."[82]

It is, nonetheless, particularly in South Africa where a Liberation Theology focusing most explicitly on issues of contemporary social analysis has developed. This emerged out of the context of the brutalities of apartheid and was an attempt to respond to the very material concerns of the oppressed in this region in ways which were not considered possible through the restrictions of western theological perspectives.[83] Borrowing much of its Black consciousness sentiment from the United States, Black Theology in South Africa, nonetheless developed contextually and offered a critique not just of an oppressive African society but also of the limitations of restricting theological and social analysis to race alone. In so doing, the work of theologians such as Allan Boesak,[84] emphasized the need for a social analysis which critiqued the overall structure of society as well as the individually oppressive components of it. Such an analysis, according to Boesak, reveals capitalism itself, as well as racism and gender issues, as problematic and oppressive.

Like Black and Latin American theology, South African Liberation Theology is keen to eliminate the harmful effects of an over-spiritualised expression of Christian faith. Yet it seeks to do so without reducing the gospel to a social and economic process. Rather it acknowledges that in the same way that sin has both personal and social consequences, so too do salvation and liberation need to be considered as inseparable entities:

> ...historical liberation remains the joint effort of both God and Christians while ultimate salvation is a

> divine gift, and historical liberation draws its lifeblood from ultimate salvation.[85]

South Africa's theologians, along with its people have, of course, recently witnessed the beginnings of a significant revolution in their society. The end of apartheid and coming to power of the nation's first Black president, however, has not ended the necessity for contextual liberation in the region.[86]

5. Womanist Theology and Liberation

To complete the overview of liberational paradigms it will be essential to include a look at those theologies which have sought to represent the experiences of women in liberational processes. Once again, the response is a broad and diffuse one covering the spectrum of theologies already considered. For the purposes of focus, it will be useful to outline the areas of work which have emerged from the context of North America since this region has produced a significant diversity and depth of material.[87]

Women's Theologies have been particularly concerned with two key areas. The first has been the issue of Biblical hermeneutics by way of a female reading of the text; the second has been social analysis in order to include and understand the realities of women struggling to overcome oppressive structures in society. Feminist Theologies have emerged from the need to address both of these issues. However, its approaches have been criticised by Black women for the ways in which White women have universalised their experiences and methodologies, thereby repeating the supremacy models of Western male theologies and serving to further marginalize non-White women.[88] Black women's theologies have not only highlighted the liberational contradictions of White feminist theologians but also have offered a critique of male-centred

liberation theologies which also fail to give sufficient space to the liberational concerns and contributions of Black women, or which do not embrace the holistic requirements of liberation generally:

> ...some liberation theologians have acquiesced in one or more oppressive aspects of the liberation struggle itself. Where racism is rejected, sexism has been embraced. Where classism is called into question, racism and sexism have been tolerated. And where sexism is repudiated racism and classism are often ignored.[89]

In their efforts at addressing the absence of the Black female presence in liberational theologies of Black men and White women, some Black women theologians have drawn upon the social analysis of women outside of the traditional theological context. In particular they have utilised the theories of Womanism[90] in order to articulate their experiences. Womanist Theology, then, has emanated from the theology of Black liberation but has evolved distinctly in that it has attempted to document and explore the complex story of the struggle against oppression made by Black women within the church and community through history. It seeks to do so through a detailed analysis of the varied roles which allow Black women to be treated as "active subjects" rather than homogenous and "impersonal objects."[91]

Delores Williams[92] has identified four key components of a Womanist methodology. Firstly, a *multidialogical intent* will enable Black women to interact with a wide range of social, political and religious contexts and identities in order to explore and compile pathways to liberation. Secondly, a *liturgical intent* will enable Black women to affect the thought, worship and action of their churches and thereby ensure, not only representation but liberative action. Thirdly, a

didactic intent, describes the responsibility Black women have to use culturally relevant means to teach Christians about the arts of moral, ethical and productive liberational realities. The fourth method involves Black women committing themselves to the maintenance of a "womanist theological language" that will not only celebrate their history, culture and spirituality but will also lead to social and theological liberation.

Whilst Womanist Theology seeks to centre itself upon the multiple identities of the Black woman, if advocates a promotion of unity rather than division. This is clearly illustrated in what Kelly Brown Douglas has described as the "social-political analysis of wholeness."[93] This details the way in which Black women have traditionally chosen to separate themselves from White feminist movements which have threatened the unity of the struggle against racial oppression which they wage collectively with Black men. The Womanist need for contextual analysis, therefore, has promoted a multi-focused attack against systems of oppression; "it will confront racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism as they impinge upon the Black community, and also as they are manifested within that community."[94] Womanist theologians, therefore, call for such an approach to be implemented within the churches. Black women, who already acknowledge God's inextricable connection with their struggles for Biblical principles of justice, must go one step further and recognise their God-ordained obligation to eliminate oppression in all of its guises.[95]

Douglas continues her theology with a "religio-cultural analysis for a spirituality of survival."[96] She points to Black women's ability to defy the multiple forces of oppression and dehumanization that have been raised against them and argues

that this has been due to a spirituality of survival which "fosters self-esteem and ...affirms the presence of God in the day-to-day struggle for survival."[97] Linking this analysis with the concept of theological wholeness, Douglas argues that Womanist theologies need to "highlight those aspects of Black culture and religion that foster self-esteem for Black women as well as men, and that help them to transcend the negative images of themselves that a racist, sexist, classist and heterosexist society projects."[98] Douglas' concept is extended by Delores Williams who argues for a "hermeneutics of survival"[99] within Womanist Theology, seeking to participate in radical struggle through the endorsement of liberational Biblical text:

> It is a hermeneutics that distinguishes between a message of liberation hidden in a text and waiting for retrieval and a liberating reading performed by a people engaged in a struggle against injustice.[100]

In this way, hermeneutics directly aligns itself with radical praxis by women on behalf of themselves and their oppressed communities.[101]

Models of Liberation in Pastoral and Popular Expression

1. Reflections of Pastoring in Jamaica

This chapter has already explored some of the significant themes to emerge out of the attempt of theologians in the Caribbean to confront the demands of liberation. It may now be useful to focus briefly on how this expression has filtered down to a pastoral and popular level of theology. This will be attempted by exploring illustrations of the progress made by some of the graduates of United Theological College of the West Indies. [102]

Pastoring in Jamaica is a demanding occupation, with one minister often servicing a circuit of two or three, or even up to six churches in one or in

neighbouring districts. Although churches, particularly in rural areas, are not usually very large (from as little as ten to perhaps forty or fifty people) their minister will be expected to fulfil the pastoral needs of each and to do this, so to speak, under his or her own steam. This means that he or she must find their own transport and make time for ministerial duties in between any part time employment that may have been obtained for purposes of subsistence. Liberational theory quickly encounters practical and often harsh reality and pastors must learn to respond to the real material needs of both themselves and of their church members as well as their communities.

The economic climate in Jamaica is a very bleak one. The ever decreasing value of the Jamaican dollar is good news for European and American tourists but for most Jamaicans it represents rising food prices, stagnated wages, hardship, struggle and subsistence living. The pastor needs to ensure that the spiritual and material mechanisms of his/her church act effectively to combat these situations and serve the total needs of the man and woman who makes up his congregation. This is achieved in a variety of ways. One pastor spoke of seeking to engender self-help projects amongst his congregation and fostering internal self reliance through the identification and utilisation of their skills. Another sought to concentrate on negating feelings of hopelessness brought about through the economic crises by "making the incarnation a living experience so that [his congregation could] think and see Christ in their daily living."[103] Most programmes included some level of practical self-help measures that were then extended to benefit the community at large. A significant number of social welfare and educational programmes in Jamaica are, in fact, church

based or initiated. In this respect, most church leaders interviewed did not shy away from political or economic intervention in the general affairs of the nation, but rather perceived it as a natural and essential extension of their ministry. As one final year student of the theological college said:

> What is politics really? It basically involves how you live. Who is the best teacher on how you live? Isn't it Jesus? What the church will do in living out politics is just talking about fair living. Talking about taking up responsibilities and giving the people what they are due...The people need social services...So politics is a way of life...the church needs to make sure how the people are able to live their life is done in accordance with fairness, justice and love.[104]

Political activity, then, is transmitted as an integral part of the local life of the church. Moreover, congregants are encouraged to take responsibility for both the spiritual and material conditions of their communities, to both encourage and be encouraged through the spiritual ministry of the church in order to better cope with and tackle life in all areas. In this way, liberation is not the exclusive domain of the pastor but is the communal responsibility of all church members. In the fieldwork carried out amongst the theological college's final year ministers, none of them felt the need to avoid socio-political issues and all were anxious to respond to the economic and social realities that faced both themselves and members of their congregations and in so doing believed that they were behaving politically.

Where such pastors are engaged in ministerial work amongst poor rural or urban congregations it is fairly easy to see how the beginnings of a practical methodology of liberation is being formed and implemented in the grass roots conditions of oppression. Where, as is sometimes the case, the graduates of

United Theological College enter into middle class, fairly prosperous assignments, the methods of liberation become a little less obvious and more difficult both to deliver and to observe. If this can be considered one of the weak links in the emancipatory chain then another must be the lack of conscious and critical reflection on praxis within both poor and middle class contexts. This is not to suggest that there is no element of reflection since an obvious, and well-utilised forum for this is the Sunday sermon. What it does imply, however, is that the level of systematic and critical reflection required for rigorous adherence to the methodology of emancipation is not fully employed at this combined pastoral and popular level. For example, although a church may provide good will gifts of food or money to members who may be sick or living on the bread line, there is, perhaps, insufficient social analysis applied at this level to suggest the reasons why such an action should be required in the first place.

One pastor who has attempted to begin such a critical reflection is Ira Brooks, the one time Youth Leader of the New Testament Church of God in Britain who has since returned to pastor a congregation on the North Coast of Jamaica. Brooks also illustrates the role played by the Caribbean diaspora in the formation of liberational theology through his review of developments in both Britain and the Caribbean. For this reason he will receive more attention in subsequent chapters.

2. FUCJCA in North America

The level of popular Liberation Theology which has been selected for focus in the American context also falls into the Caribbean diaspora category since it is a Pentecostal denomination which was established in Jamaica and has travelled

to America via Caribbean migrants from Britain and the various islands of the Caribbean. The First United Church of Jesus Christ Apostolic in Brooklyn has a 450-strong membership and is comprised of a predominantly older congregation and pastored by a father and son team. Like many similarly located churches, it is very often directly confronted with the problems of crime and drugs which affect the whole neighbourhood. Consequently, through its junior pastor, Tony, and some other young people, the Church has attempted a series of initiatives in order to try and combat some of the issues. Covering social concerns such as AIDS, poverty, education and homelessness, the community programme was intended as a means of challenging a history of complacency in the church and encouraging it to wake up and respond to the social realities which quite literally surrounded it:

> ...we feel very strongly that the spirit has been catered for so long in the Black Church that we've totally forgotten about the body and the soul, so there needs to be a balance and a continuity going in order for one to be effective.[105]

As part of this drive for effectiveness and as part of the community programme, the church also runs a series of discussions, sometimes as part of the regular auxiliary meetings, where external speakers are invited to share issues of relevance with the believers. This can include AIDS awareness, for example, or inform on some of the stress-related health issues that often affect Black women. They are also beginning to link up with other churches in the area mostly for worship but increasingly for discussion on social issues.

First United also functions to booster individual confidence to deal with the realities of oppression and disadvantage by faith in God. In addition to this

personal message, however, it stresses the importance of an active social gospel that does not ignore the practical needs of the community; as Tony commented:

> ...the Bible speaks about I was hungry and you did not feed me. I was without clothes and you did not clothe me. We feel that we need to be transformed, we need to be saved, we also need to reach out to our fellow man because nobody else is going to.[106]

There is also a limit to the reactionary effect of eschatology within the church in spite of the fact that attention is still drawn to the need to prepare oneself for better things to come. The message encourages improvement in terms of preparing for the future through activity in the present.

There remains, however, something of an ambiguous attitude towards direct involvement with the political realm amongst the churches, and this has much to do with the legacy of political leadership from within the wider church in New York. There is the feeling that involvement with politics tends to blur the focus, not only on the spiritual message but also on the need for local care. In such instances it is felt that the political leader becomes so taken up with the legalities of political campaigning that he becomes ineffective in the provision of practical services for the community he is supposed to be representing. This social critique of 'playing politics' rather than engaging in social change means that whilst political involvement in the form of, for example, voter registrations drives is encouraged within the church, political campaigning, which is considered to detract from the spiritual and social ministry, is not.

Learning from Liberation

This chapter has set out the meanings of liberation when applied to theological conditions and outlined some of the key themes in seven liberational paradigms. What remains to be done is to decipher which principles, concerning the nature of liberation, can be gleaned from these collective examples and, from the basis of critical analysis of the BLC, be applied to the British context. This will be the final task attempted here.

In spite of the diverse and sometimes divergent arguments, methodologies and modes of analyses raised by the issue of liberation in theology, there are several features that can be identified which may throw light on the task in hand. They relate to the context, scope and method of theology and can best be stated as follows:

1. Liberation Theology is a contextual theology. That is to say, it needs to identify and respond to the specific circumstances that emanate from its specific location.

2. Liberation Theology is a holistic theology. It must engage with the range of oppressions within its given context and this should include those originating without as well as within its context.

3. Liberation Theology must engage in social analysis. It must not be afraid to use whatever tools of social analysis are most suited to helping identify the historical causes of contemporary conditions and effective solutions for oppression.

4. It is also necessary for Liberation theologians to engage in critical reflection upon their liberational praxis, in order to ensure that progress and development

is maintained and to ensure, too, that liberation remains connected to and inspired by a spiritual source.

5. Liberation Theology must be dialogical and ecumenical in its approach. In its pursuit of liberation it must make useful alliances with other oppressed groups both inside and outside of a church context.

6. Finally, liberation needs to manifest itself at popular, pastoral and professional levels. Each level must contribute to sustaining and nurturing the others in the overall pursuit of liberation.

If these can be described as the underpinning or universal characteristics of all theologies seeking to confront and respond to the demands of liberation then they will form invaluable criteria for an assessment of the existence or nature of liberation within the British BLC. It is, then, the remaining purpose of this dissertation to begin to confront the Church's own context in order to determine the validity of the original thesis. The resulting material will need to interact closely with the understanding of Liberation Theology explored in this chapter.

In order to commence this task it is necessary to return to the concept of contextual, historical analysis; to understand the nature of the BLC by exploring key themes which have been important in its creation and development.

Notes and References

[1] Boff and Boff, op.cit, pg. 7.

[2] Ibid, chapter 2.

[3] Ibid, pg. 12.

[4] Ibid, pg. 13.

[5] Ibid, pg. 13.

[6] The professional level of expression of Liberation Theology certainly does exist in Britain amongst the Black Led Church and is discussed at length as part of the issues emerging from the concept of active radicalism as expressed in chapters five and six.

[7] Robert Schreiter, **Constructing Local Theologies**, (SCM Press, 1985) pg. 13.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid, pgs. 6-12.

[11] See for example Brown, op.cit, pgs. 93-5. Also Deane Ferm, op.cit, explores some of the criticisms which have been levelled at Liberation Theology on the grounds of its Marxist and therefore predominantly materialist reading of the theology.

[12] Alistair Kee, **Domination or Liberation, The Place of Religion in Social Conflict**, (SCM Press, 1986) pg. 67.

[13] Ibid, pg. 69.

[14] Gibellini, op. cit, pg. 4.

[15] Ibid, pg. 5.

[16] Ibid.

[17] See Gutierrez, op. cit, (1974). Also Brown, op. cit, pg. 60-62.

[18] Gibellini, op.cit, pg. 30.

[19] Boff and Boff, op.cit. pg. 44-6.

[20] Ferm, op. cit, pg. 18.

[21] Boff and Boff, op.cit, pg. 24.

[22] See, for example, Kee, op.cit. pg. 76-8.

[23] Boff and Boff, op.cit, pg. 32.

[24] Ibid, pg. 34

[25]Gutierrez, as cited in Brown, op.cit, pg. 84.

[26] Brown, Ibid, pg. 99.

[27] Ibid, pg. 100-101.

[28] E.g. Jose Severino Croatto. See Ferm, op.cit, pg. 49.

[29] For example, Jose Porfirio Miranda, Ibid, pg. 34. The two positions are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

[30] For example, Rubem Alves came from a Presbyterian background and developed a theology which was strongly aligned with the European Theology of Hope. See ibid, pg. 27-30.

[31] For example Segundo Galilea, ibid, pg. 47-8.

[32] The details and implications of these criticisms will be explored in more details in chapter six.

[33] See Boff and Boff, op.cit, pg. 63.

[34] Kee, op.cit, pg. 80.

[35] John White, **Black Leadership in America, 1895 - 1968**, (Longman 1985), V. P. Franklin, **Black Self-Determination: A Cultural History of the Faith of the Fathers**, (Lawrence Hill and Company, 1984), Adam Fairclough, **To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and M.L. King Jnr.** (University of Georgia Press, 1987) also Rhoda Lois, **Civil Rights: The 1960s Freedom Struggle**, (Twayne Publishers, 1984).

[36] James Cone, **Martin & Malcolm & America, A Dream or a Nightmare**, (Orbis, 1991).

[37] James Cone, **Black Theology and Black Power**, (Seabury Press, 1969).

[38] Vincent Harding, *Black Power and the American Christ* in Gayraud Wilmore and James Cone, **Black Theology a Documentary History, 1966-1979.**

[39] Cone, **A Black Theology of Liberation, Twentieth Anniversary Edition** (Orbis Books, 1990) pg. 58.

[40] Wilmore and Cone, op.cit, pg. 23.

[41] For example Alistair Kee, op.cit. Cone also reflects on the problematic nature of Black Theology in **For My People, Black Theology and the Black Church**, (Orbis, 1984).

[42]Cone, op.cit, (1990) pg. 36.

[43] National Conference of the Black Theology Project, 1977, *Message to the Black Church and Community*, in Cone and Wilmore, op, cit. pg. 347-8.

[44] Cone, op.cit, (1975). Also, the works already cited.

[45] Wilmore, **Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of Afro-American People**, (Orbis Books, 1986).

[46] J. Deotis Roberts, **A Black Political Theology**, (Westminster Press, 1974).

[47] James W. Fowler, *Black Theologies of Liberation: A Structural -Developmental Analysis,* in B. Mahan and L. Dale Richeisin (eds.) **The Challenge of Liberation Theology**, (Orbis, 1984).

[48] See for example, Cone, op.cit, (1975).

[49] Most of this criticism has been levelled at early Black Theology which, in its efforts at aligning itself with the Black narrative, appeared to endorse the rioting and violence that spread through northern cities in the closing years of the sixties. Alistair Kee has argued that Black Theology arose largely out of the need to provide an alternative to other Black nationalist rejections of White supremacy. (Kee, op.cit, pg. 41) One such example of this is Albert Cleage's philosophy of Black Christian nationalism (Cleage, **Black Christian Nationalism, New Directions for the Black** Church (Morrow Quill, 1972) which Kee describes as a response to the rise of the Nation of Islam.

[50] See for example Kee, op.cit, pg. 45-6.

[51]Cone, op.cit (1975) pg. 43.

[52] Theo Witvliet, **The Way of the Black Messiah**, (SCM Press, 1987).

[53]The focus in this paradigm is on the British speaking Caribbean.

[54] See, for example, William Watty, **From Shore to Shore, Soundings in Caribbean Theology** (Kingston, Jamaica, 1981 - published lecture papers) Also, Ashley Smith, **Emerging From Innocence, Religion, Theology and Development**, (Eureka Press, 1991).

[55] Kortright Davis, op.cit. pg. 106.

[56] Ibid, pg. 107.

[57] Ibid, pgs. 32 -40.

[58] Lewin. L. Williams, **Caribbean Theology**, (Peter Lang, 1994) pg. 32.

[59] Smith, op.cit pg. 10.

[60] Watty, op.cit pg. 19. Imposition refers to the establishment of missionary religion in the Caribbean and with it an enforced value system and way of life which in many cases has left those Caribbean adherents more traditional in their denominational loyalties than their European equivalents. The element of imitation is the characteristic of ideological dependency which has enabled this pattern to continue and is also present in the lust for the foreign experience in both the secular and religious world.

[61]Williams, op.cit, pg. 176.

[62]Smith, op.cit, pg. 12-13.

[63]Watty, op.cit pg. 25.

[64] Williams, op.cit, pg. 196.

[65] Ibid, pg. 25.

[66] See for example, Hood, op.cit. chp. 2.

[67] Watty, op.cit, pg. 45.

[68] Ibid, pg. 45-6.

[69] Ibid, pg. 22.

[70] Dr. Ambrose Finlay, the then Dean of the college, from a recorded interview, June 1992.

[71] The Council describes itself as acting as a spokesbody for the Church in Jamaica. It consists of eleven member Churches as well as an umbrella group of associate members which, unlike the theological college, does include the Seventh Day Adventist and main Pentecostal groups. The Council takes a participatory role in national politics and was, for example, called upon by Prime Minster P.J. Patterson for a consultation on how the Church could more fully contribute to and have a voice within society. It's principal aims and objectives are geared towards the creation of a uniform Christian voice within the social turmoil of Jamaica and through the years, particularly within the political unrest of the seventies, it has involved itself in peace making missions between warring party factions. There is also an attempt at representing the Church in the social aspects of Jamaican life. This is carried out through a series of discussion and action stations called Commissions.

[72] Davis, op.cit, pg. 104 .

[73] Ibid, pg. 115 .

[74] K.C. Abraham's **Third World Theologies: Commonalities and Divergences**, (Orbis, 1990), pg. 46.

[75] The history and processes of Western dominance and exploitation has been well chronicled by scholars such as Walter Rodney; see **How Europe Underdeveloped Africa**, (Bogle L'overture Publications, 1972. A good overview of more contemporary issues affecting Africa is provided by the *African Report* in Abraham, (ibid), although this still predates the end of apartheid in S. Africa.

[76] Mercy Amba Oduyoye in Abraham, ibid, pg. 101.

[77] As cited in Witvliet, op.cit. (1985) pg. 99.

[78] *The Africa Report,* to the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, op, cit.

[79] Ibid, pg. 48.

[80] Ibid, pg. 50.

[81]For example, John Mbiti, **African Religions and Philosophy** (Heinemann, 1990) and Lamin Sanneh, **West African Christianity, The Religious Impact**, (C. Hurst & Co, 1983).

[82]Itumeleng Mosala in Mosala and Tihagale (eds.), **The Unquestionable Right to be Free**, (Orbis, 1990) pg. 98.

[83]Zolile Mbali, **The Churches and Racism, A Black, South African Perspective**, (SCM Press, 1987) pg. 4.

[84] Allan Boesak, **Farewell To Innocence: A Socio-Ethical Study on Black Theology and Power** (Maryknoll Orbis, 1977).

[85]Simon Maimela, *Current Themes and Emphases in Black Theology* in Mosala and Tihagale, op.cit, pg. 110.

[86] See for example Nomazengele A. Mangaliso, **The South African Mosaic: A Sociological Analysis of Post-Apartheid Conflict** (University Press of America, 1994).

[87] Women in the 'Third World' have also begun to address the need for issues of gender to be tackled in the overall framework of liberation and particularly amongst those individuals and organisations who are already involved in the creation of Theologies of Liberation. See for example Mercy Amba Oduyoye's critique of sexism within EATWOT; *Reflections from a Third World Woman's Perspective: Women's Experience and Liberation Theologies* in Ursula King (ed.) **Feminist Theology from the Third World** (SPCK / Orbis, 1994).

[88] See for example, Jacquelyn Grant, **White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus; Feminist Christology and Womanist Response** (Scholars Press, 1989).

[89]Jacqueline Grant, *Black Theology and the Black Woman* in Cone and Wilmore, op.cit, pg. 418.

[90] As coined by Alice Walker, **In Search of Our Mother's Gardens**, (Women's Press, 1984). Although the concept and practice of Womanism is often given a much earlier date and is connected, for example, to the activities of freedom fighter such as Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman. See for example, Delores S. Williams, *Womanist Theology: Black Women's Voices* in James Cone and Gayraud Wilmore, (eds.) **Black Theology: A Documentary History, Volume Two 1980 - 1992** (Orbis, 1993).

[91]Katie G. Cannon, *Hitting a Straight Lick with a Crooked Stick: The Womanist Dilemma in the Development of a Black Liberation Ethic,* in ibid, pg. 305.

[92]Delores Williams, op.cit, pgs. 269 -271.

[93]Kelly Brown Douglas, **The Black Christ** (Orbis, 1994) pg. 97.

[94] Douglas, *Womanist Theology: What is its Relationship to Black Theology?* in Cone and Wilmore, op.cit, (1993) pg. 295.

[95]This call to holistic liberation has meant that Womanist Theology itself has come under attack for its silences on issues of sexuality within the Church. See Renee L. Hill, *Who are we for each other?: Sexism, Sexuality and Womanist Theology* in ibid.

[96]Douglas in Cone and Wilmore, op.cit. pg. 296.

[97] Ibid, pg. 297.

[98] Ibid, pg. 298.

[99] See the chapter on *Feminist and Womanist Criticism* in George Aichele etal, **The Post Modern Bible: The Bible and Culture Collective**, (Yale University Press, 1995) pg. 251.

[100] Ibid, pg. 253.

[101] See for example Renita Weems, **Just A Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women's Relationships in the Bible**, (Lura Media, 1988).

[102] Material is drawn from research findings in Jamaica. See appendices for further details.

[103] Interviewee, Jamaica, 1992.

[104] Joel Downer, Moravian Church minister and Theological College student, interview, 1992.

[105] From a recorded interview with Tony Gayle, FUCJCA, February, 1992.

[106] Ibid.

Chapter Three :Contextual Themes in Historical Development

> ***Whether we are born in Britain or not, we are brought up in homes which adapt a West Indian or African culture. We adapt that culture and due to adopting that culture our identity and course of reasoning will be very different.***[1]

This chapter will extend the focus on contextual theology by identifying and exploring five key themes which have emerged from the processes of development of the BLC. In order to do so effectively, it will return to the notion of African Caribbean Christianity (ACC), which has so far been identified as the spiritual and theological expressions of Christian faith by African Caribbean people. Although the notion of ACC applies to believers who belong to a wide and varied range of organisations, it is my contention that, when applied to the British context, it has been most completely manifested through the medium of the BLC.

The following five themes are offered as the most appropriate means through which the BLC can be presented as a contextual narrative which says something about its historical or developmental nature. This is a necessary exercise since an understanding of these development processes provides an essential foundation for making sense of the contemporary liberational identities of the BLC in Britain. The geographical focus of this chapter will be Jamaica. This has been chosen since it has been identified, most consistently, as the predominant island of origin for most of the respondents within this study and, indeed, since this is also true statistically of the wider African Caribbean population of Britain.[2]

The methodological emphasis of this chapter is not a chronological and in-depth history of ACC in Britain and the Caribbean. It is, rather, by reference to selected

authors and my fieldwork within the region identified, an outlining of certain significant characteristics or features which have affected, and which continue to affect, the way in which ACC both interprets the world and expresses itself within it, whether in the Caribbean or in Britain. It is with the purpose of so doing that certain historical events and/or processes have been selected for description and analysis. The five themes to be considered are as follows:

1. Heritage - referring to the legacy of an African spiritual world view.
2. Theological and cultural syncretism - referring to the merger of two distinct theological and cultural traditions.
3. Continuity and Conflict - describing the processes of maintaining heritage whilst simultaneously adjusting to the impositions of Euro-American theology and culture.
4. Innovation and Conservatism - describing the outcome of conflict and reflecting the seeming contradictions in ACC expression.
5. Spirituality and Liberation - exploring the role which spirituality has played in counteracting the conservatism which emerges from the contradictions, as will be outlined, of ACC identity.

While the following sections describe the themes as individual areas of historical development within the ACC narrative, these must also be considered as overlapping and highly inter-connected. So, for example, heritage is extended through the process of continuity. It is challenged by the movement towards adaptation which is represented in conflict, and reasserts itself through innovative practices epitomised by a spirituality of resistance.

1. Heritage

The Caribbean theologian Kortright Davis has observed that reconstruction within the Caribbean "will not be fully achievable through religion without a rediscovery of the African soul."[3] This equally well applies to the attempts of the BLC to reconstruct society in Britain in the light of the requirements of liberational theory. In both instances it is important to unearth the relationship which ACC has with its African past since this will provide a means of more clearly understanding not only the historical development but also the contemporary expression of spirituality and theology within the BLC. More importantly, the failure to do so may lead to a misinterpretation or oversimplification of these expressions. This, then, is the purpose of introducing the theme of African heritage. It is to assert that ACC in Britain (and subsequently, BLC interpretations of liberation) needs to be understood from the vantage point of its historical origins and that one significant element of these origins is provided by its African cosmological heritage. The elements required to complete the developmental equation are Euro-American religion and slavery, and these will be explored separately in the themes to follow.

The term African heritage is used here not only to suggest a cultural and ideological[4] connection between the Caribbean and Africa, but also to attempt to define the nature of this connection. The cultural relationship between the Americas and Africa has been the focus of much academic study.[5] Traditional debates have tended to fall into one of two camps: one arguing for the existence of strong African cultural retention in the Caribbean, another providing evidence for a complete break in cultural traditions.[6] In between these two perspectives are observers who point

to the necessity for a revaluation of the nature of culture, emphasizing the difficulties in perceiving it as a static entity which can be either reproduced or eliminated holistically in a new environment. Mintz and Price[7], for example, have argued that it is much more appropriate to identify a continued African heritage rather than culture:

> We conceive of culture as being closely tied to the institutional forms which articulate it. In contrast, the notion of a shared West African heritage takes on meaning only in a comparative context, when one asks what, if any, features the various cultural systems of West Africa may have had in common.[8]

For Mintz and Price this African heritage represents "deep-level cultural principles, assumptions and understandings which were shared by the Africans in any New World colony" and which served as a catalyst for these 'New World' Africans to come together as a community and to create new systems of culture.[9] In this way African heritage can be seen as the foundation of, and the medium through which, the later processes of indigenization and syncretism were able to take place. It also enables the creation of a cultural link between Africa and the Caribbean which allows for the historical and geographical complexity of cultural representations in Africa and the heterogeneous nature of the 'African consciousness' which was transported to the Caribbean through slavery. As a prelude to the themes to follow, therefore, it will be useful to explore in further detail, these "deep-level assumptions and understandings" by which an African spiritual heritage may be defined. In so doing, it needs to be recognised that the underlying focus is placed not on a comprehensive analysis of African cosmology but rather upon those elements of

African identity which have been influential in determining the meaning of liberation within the contemporary BLC.[10]

The Caribbeanist George Mulrain has identified seven attributes or concepts of African spirituality that have come to form a central part of the religious heritage of the Caribbean. These are: 1) the concept of the *spirit-filled universe. 2) death as a transition period. 3)* communication with the spirit world through *dreams and visions. 4) evil* as a "real and potent force" in the universe, 5) the *extended family structure* alongside the spirit of polygamy 6) *time* awareness that centres around "Kairos...opportune time or event" as opposed to chronological time, and 7)*worship* as an occasion for celebration made more enjoyable by the presence of a representative from the spirit world.[11] This African-derived consciousness is something which Mulrain believes is implicit in a range of Christian-based religious expressions within the Caribbean. It can be represented by what Mervyn Alleyne has described as a cultural *continuum of variation*[12], what Barry Chevannes has termed an African *world view*[13] and what Kortright Davis has labelled, the *African Soul in Caribbean Religion.*[14] Hence, while the clearest manifestation of African spiritual heritage can be explicitly identified in Jamaica's Obeah, Cuba's Santeria, Trinidad's Shango and Haiti's Vodun[15], for example, it is also expressed in a world view which has significantly influenced the various Christian religious expressions on these islands. It is this observation which is most crucial for the purposes of this thesis.

Mulrain's seven concepts are useful in breaking down some of the key areas of African spiritual influence in ACC and, in so doing, they go some way in identifying

the manner in which the spirituality of the BLC is able to form the foundation of its approach to liberation. To illustrate this further, it will be useful to focus on three of these concepts, namely those concerning *dreams and visions, extended family structures* and *worship*. These, most effectively illustrate, concepts which can be traced through significant areas of development in African Caribbean Christianity in the Caribbean and Britain.

Revelation

The idea that communication between the material world and the spirit world is most frequently achieved through the dreams and visions of spiritually attuned humans is a central feature of African cosmology and the African spiritual heritage in the Caribbean. Hence James Phillippo, referring to the Revivalists of Jamaica, was able to observe that:

> "dreams and visions constituted fundamental articles of their creed. Some supernatural revelations were regarded as indispensable to qualify for admission to the full privileges for their community. Candidates were required indeed to dream a certain number of dreams before they were received to membership, the subjects of which were given them by their teacher."[16]

This pattern is further revealed in the nineteenth century 'ticket and leadership' system of the Baptists which revolved around their controversial method of accepting candidates for baptism only after they had experienced a series of dreams or evidenced a particular revelation of work of the Holy Spirit.[17]

The principle of revelation in both of the above cases was able to provide a vital means of autonomy and self-determination for its practitioners. During slavery, it was an ideal means of counteracting the intended conservatism of planter or

missionary-based Christian evangelism through its provision of an alternative source for authenticating the gospel message. Outside of the context of slavery this has remained its implicit function. The emphasis on dreams and visions creates a means of legitimising an independent Christian identity by challenging and thereby taking full initiative out of the hands of White/colonial/dominant authority. In its most extreme manifestation it means that the oppressed are given direct mandate to violently revolt against their oppression, as was the case with North America's Nat Turner.[18] However, even in less explicitly rebellious ways it serves to undermine the authority of dominant theology.

The centrality of revelation is a feature of Sabbatarian, Holiness and Pentecostal Church traditions (although it is especially significant in the form of dreams and visions in the latter group.)[19] A useful illustration of this is provided in the role it has played in the maintenance of an independent spiritual tradition amongst the BLC in Britain following the period of post war Caribbean migration. The concept of direct revelation from God played a significant part in the consciousness of those believers who laid the foundations for the development of the BLC in Britain. Indeed in some cases, it constituted the central push and pull factor for those migrants who left their homes and churches in the Caribbean with the understanding that God had called them to the UK "for such a time as this." [20] Hence, the physical act of church building in the 1950s and 60s was often underpinned by a sense of spiritual mission and calling as is demonstrated, for example, in Bishop Dunn's account of the process which led to the acquiring of FUCJCA's first church building:

> I was working in Aston in a warehouse...and it was the Monday after the Sunday when we couldn't get a

> church...I heard a voice speaking to me to go up to Gibson Road. It was five to one and we usually had lunch one till two and I said "Lord it is you. I haven't found anyone to give us a room." It never said anything else so I took out my sandwich and I had a bicycle. I rode up to Six Ways through to Lozells... As I got there there were two men standing outside as if waiting to meet me. As soon as I approached them, I asked them, "Sir, I'd like to use this building for religious purposes, who do I ask?..."[21]

The eventual outcome was that he was able to meet with the church committee, fill in an application and move into the premises the following Sunday. Eventually the church went on to purchase the building for £3000. For Bishop Dunn the most significant aspect of the story was that his problem was not solved in his human nature, but rather through the provision of God directly intervening to meet the needs of his people and that this intervention occurred through the medium of revelation. This was to become the cornerstone of the church's relationship with the material realities of oppression that confronted them within society.

Dreams and visions also played a significant part in the process of BLC growth from the numbers of disaffected Christians from Britain's TBCs. As one interview respondent revealed:

> I came here as an Anglican but that did not work out because Black people were not accepted in the Anglican churches in those days....That did not force me, anyway, to go into the Pentecostal church. I went...because of a dream I had one night, it showed me the church and exactly as I had seen it was exactly the morning I went and it couldn't be any plainer...I was very, very burdened, very depressed...I said help me to find a church and that night I dreamt I saw this church. That morning I got up and things I didn't do for three months I began to do it...[22]

Once again, what emerges is the centrality, in the believer's mind, of directly revealed divine intervention into the material realities of life. In social terms it results in an individual rejecting the negative consequences of racism in favour of a reaffirmation of an alternative, and liberational, identity. In the language of theology it can be understood as the alignment of God with the cause of the oppressed; as a spiritual experience of the believer, it is received as an act of divine guidance and deliverance.

On an explicit level revelation serves as a meeting place for divine will and material reality. In so doing it has a further implicit function of contributing to the self determination of Black faith and the BLC as the body which nurtures it.

Kinship and Community

In his account of extended family structure, Mulrain focuses on the existence of the 'spirit' of polygamy[23] in Caribbean society. However the concept also describes the continuity of the 'spirit' of kinship as described by John Mbiti in his analysis of *African Religions and Philosophy:*

> The kinship system is like a vast network stretching laterally (horizontally) in every direction, to embrace everybody in any given local group. This means that each individual is a brother or sister, father or mother, grandmother or grandfather, or cousin, or brother-in-law, uncle or aunt, or something else, to everybody else...When two strangers meet in a village, one of the first duties is to sort out how they may be related to each other, and having discovered how the kinship system applies to them, they behave to each other according to the accepted behaviour set down by society."[24]

In spite of the huge amount of both deliberate and consequential disruption caused by slavery to this organisation of African kinship traditions, many Caribbean historians point to the re-emergence or reconstruction of similar relationships within the enslaved communities of the Americas.[25] Barbara Bush, for example, argues that "family and kin were perhaps the most vital element in the life of an individual slave and the basic social framework of the slave community."[26] The significance of kinship relations, then, becomes yet another vital part of the African heritage in Caribbean society and of the organisation of African Caribbean religious expression. In terms of the current discussion on the liberational traits of heritage, special attention must be given to notions of community - and specifically religious community - responsibility and identity.

If this organisation of kinship relations was as foundational as Bush suggests, then it must also be seen to have penetrated the religious identities of the 'slaves'[27] and simultaneously to have been reinforced by it. That is to say that community organisation and religion often shared a symbiotic relationship. On the one hand, newly created kinship bonds between orphaned children, widowed mothers and childless fathers were able to produce new community identities which, in turn, provided a source for the creation of adapted religious expressions. On the other hand, the reinforcement of the subsequently created African-influenced religions, particularly in the century of British slavery before the coming of the missionaries, was able to act as a base for community solidarity, group upliftment and, in some cases, organised rebellion.[28] Religion was indeed a means of creating a new community identity and basis for loyalty and responsibility replacing that which had

been lost through the deliberate and accidental separation of African tribal and kinship groups. The subversive implications for this kind of group identity was clearly recognised by the planters and consequently led to the passing of prohibitionary laws against such assemblies.[29]

By the time of the arrival of missionary groups in the Caribbean the centrality of autonomous kinship and community allegiances had been established in the consciousness and social realities of Creole[30] 'slaves'. This is evidenced, moreover, in the allegiance the 'slaves' gave to those missionary groups that allowed for the greatest level of independent community organisation. Hence whereas the Moravians, with their rigid structures and missionary-led services, achieved only modest success amongst the 'slaves', the Methodists and, particularly the Baptists (who allowed and even encouraged independent worship activity) were much more successful in gaining the support of the 'slaves'. It was, above all, through the Baptists, under the efforts of the 'ex-slave' George Liele and his associate, Moses Baker, that independent religious communities were able to take root and flourish. In comparison with the Moravians who, after fifty years of work in Jamaica, had recruited 938 converts, Liele and his assistants could, in just thirty one years of activity, claim 8000 members. They were so successful that they needed to send to the Baptist Missionary Society in Britain for assistance, which they received in 1814 in the form of the missionary John Rowe.

The desire for autonomous religious community lay at the heart of the success of the Baptist missionary movement in Jamaica. In this respect it was taken far beyond what Liele or Baker could have intended. As a missionary movement, unlike its

Methodist counterpart, it was aimed directly at the majority enslaved population. Converted 'slaves' were permitted to set up their own religious gatherings and to have their own leaders. This provided an ideal space for the infiltration of the movement by African-influenced spiritualities (Myalism, Obeah etc.) that could at last gain legitimacy under the auspices of conventional Baptist faith.[31] It also facilitated the further consolidation of community identity amongst the 'slaves'. This was particularly important for the Creole 'slaves' for whom the new Baptist faith provided a means of collectively resistant identity and allegiance in the same way that geographical origin had served those African born 'slaves' previously.[32] So successful was it that the Sam Sharpe rebellion (dubbed the Baptist War) of 1831 and the post slavery activities of Paul Bogle and William Gordon in the Morant Bay rebellion of 1865 can be attributed to its influence.[33]

The significance of kinship ties and responsibilities as an essential part of the African heritage of ACC, then, manifests itself in the realities of both pre and post-emancipation Caribbean society. If allegiance to the Baptist church symbolised this craving for independent and functional community in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, then the Christian tradition that has mimicked this pattern most closely in the twentieth century is Pentecostalism.[34]

Although the development of Pentecostalism will be more closely examined under the subsequent themes, it is important here to note that its arrival in the post war Caribbean[35] provided another significant structure through which the realities of local community identity were able to be nurtured and sustained. Like the Baptist faith nearly a century and a half previously, Pentecostalism came to the Caribbean

from America and provided both an official and informal structure for the preservation of the African heritage of community structures and responsibilities. It arrived at a time when the British Caribbean was experiencing rapid urbanisation and industrialisation and was able to respond, particularly, to the social implications of this. It nurtured a close knit community of believers with their own set of values, regulations, leaders, counsellors and even bankers through which members were better able to adjust to and prosper within a rapidly modernising society.[36] It is particularly significant that, in this role, Pentecostalism contributed to the development of an independent national identity, albeit that this eventually became part of a wider neo-colonial reality.[37]

Within the context of Britain, the heritage of kinship relations continued, not just within the Pentecostal churches, but within the wider BLC tradition. Here the concepts of community creation, mutual support and reinforced, indeed, *recreated* identity, become more clearly focused.[38] For both the first generation of Caribbean migrants and for the current supporters of the BLC, membership involves access into an active family network and this is, very often, a contributing factor for those who choose to become involved within the Churches. Inherited kinship roles mean that congregation members become each other's brothers, sisters, mothers and fathers; each church becomes a family with it its own rules and regulations and which simultaneously offers its members a sense of stability and belonging in the midst of what is still often a hostile external environment.

However, kinship does not simply create a comforting family bosom from which members can hide away from the social, economic and political realities of British

society. It also provides an anchor from which members can launch out and confront the difficulties of life in the knowledge that one is protected by a solid mutual support mechanism. As the theologian, Walter Hollenweger has stated when describing the individual who takes up membership:

> He is now no longer at the mercy of uncertainty, hunger, unemployment, drunkenness, boredom and homelessness, because he has once again become part of a 'family' because he has 'brothers' and 'sisters' who help him and give his life moral direction.[39]

The conversion experience, in fact, becomes for the member the first step of initiation into this community and this relationship is then consolidated throughout the Church life of the born again believer. As one interviewee responded when asked why he had joined the church:

> ...Two reasons; that's where my family; my grandparents worshipped, that's where my mum went when she was younger...and also I believe I was led there cause it wasn't something I chose to do, it was just I went there and I had a work to do and that's what I'm doing in the church... I'm not working as in a leadership position, I haven't got a position but I've got like a commission to do in the church...[40]

and another:

> Shiloh is like a mother and father to me. The people are like my brothers and sisters...We're closer than friends. I can ask them for anything...I could tell them I haven't got any money today...and something will come my way.[41]

In recreating and reaffirming this close sense of kinship within the structures and ethos of its communities the BLC draws upon an African organisational principle which has been firmly established as a vital part of its heritage. This heritage,

moreover, has played a vital role in nurturing faith and promoting independent Christian identity. It is in this role that it has contributed towards the cause of liberative thought and action within these communities.

Worship

The final element of Mulrain's African-inherited concepts to be considered here is that of worship. In his analysis he describes two essential features of African worship: (1) a joyful and multi-faceted expression and (2) a need for direct and manifested connection with the spirit world. Both of these principles were expressed by Mbiti when he argued that, for the African, "worship is 'uttered' rather than meditational, in the sense that it is expressed in external forms, the body speaking both for itself and the spirit."[42] This kind of involved worship style is perhaps the most clearly demonstrated element of the African religious heritage in the Caribbean and in Britain. It is, however, not only in the manifestation of worship but also in its meaning that an African heritage is embraced. Once again, as Mbiti relates:

> Worship is also used as a means of creating harmony in the world of mankind. People turn to God generally when trouble comes. They need at such times to restore their peace, happiness and sense of security. If nothing is done, they fear that things will get worse. Worship helps them to get back a sense of peace and religious harmony in their life and in the world at large. Through worship man...reminds himself that he is both body and spirit and that he needs to look after both of these in order to have full integrity. Without this spiritual direction or orientation, man would feel lost in the universe and life would seem to have no meaning.[43]

Hence, within the African cosmological tradition, worship serves as a central means of interpreting the world and of maintaining equilibrium within it. In keeping with the understanding of the all pervasive spiritual nature of the world, active worship is not just a recommended but an essential part of life experience, whether this experience is negative or positive. To this extent, worship becomes a very practical phenomenon which is able to adapt and address itself to every experience in life. It is as much for the pragmatic use of the people as it is for the specified requirements of the divine.[44] It is in these aspects too, that it relates most explicitly to Davis' concept of the African soul in Caribbean religion.

In both the Caribbean and in Britain, the prevalence of the African worship ethos within ACC spirituality has represented a most significant demonstration of African heritage. It has been, moreover, a significant and conspicuous catalyst for independent development within ACC. This is evident in a number of ways. Firstly by the flourishing of African religions such as Obeah and Myalism on the Caribbean plantations.[45] Secondly by the ways in which these practices were accommodated by the Christian denominations that became established following the activities of missionaries in the mid to late eighteenth century. The Native Baptists, for example "considered themselves Christian, but...they stressed personal interaction with spirits more than sin and salvation...Some cult leaders required spirit possession for membership."[46] In the same way, even after the abolition of slavery, the continued influence of the African worship ethos on Christian teachings and practice led eventually to the development of Revivalism and Pocomania out of Myalism. Although, at one level, such movements represented the increased hold of

European Christianity on the mind sets and lifestyles of the Creole populations, at the heart of their expression existed a mode of worship which was grounded in an African world view.[47] Moreover these new developments were constantly revitalised through the reality of religious revival, as for example those which occurred in Jamaica in the 1860s.

Even amongst those religious expressions more conventionally linked to their Euro-American missionary sources, the maintenance of an African centred worship style still predominates.[48] That is to say, at the heart of African Caribbean religious identity is a worship style that demands holistic participation and three-way interaction. This includes interaction between the worshipper and his/her fellow worshippers, (particularly the spiritual leader/pastor), the spirit(s), or the Holy Spirit, and the divinity (God/Jesus). Only when such an interaction is achieved can worship be recognised as authentic and successful. This is evidenced in the Holiness, Sabbatarian and Pentecostal traditions of the twentieth century and, particularly in the case of the latter movement, is a characteristic which has been observed by religionists such as Hollenweger, Tomlin, Macrobert and Calley.[49]

These twentieth century developments in the Caribbean, although being influenced, in the main, by Christian movements from America rather than Europe, have nonetheless maintained strong links with African expressions and interpretations of worship. Pentecostalism, for example, having been established in America out of the experiences of the Black American preacher, William Seymour, has become defined universally by its worship style which hinges on direct experience of the

Holy Spirit and an holistic engagement with praise which comes out of, and impacts upon, life experience. As Macrobert has observed:

> The importance of being possessed by the Holy Spirit was not merely a glossolalic experience but an infusion of the love and power which could transform the inequalities of a racist society and a segregated church, and prepare the world for the end of history when the social order would be reversed.[50]

Hence, in its Jamaican context, as has earlier been suggested, Pentecostalism, with its distinctive mode of worship, has been able to serve as an importance base for energetic community adhesion in the midst of rapid social change. This characteristic, moreover, has transferred and adapted itself amongst those Caribbean Pentecostal communities in Britain.[51]

Although each of the denominational traditions do vary in the intensity of the manifestation of African worship styles, they continue, in their British context, to share in common a commitment to involved and holistic worship. As one church member testified:

> Basically, we're not separated beings...we're all made up of the spirit, the physical part, the emotional, the mental. When I go to church, I'm still in my material state but then there's a higher level which is the spiritual realm and there is a connection there.[52]

This continued acceptance and practice of integrated worship also means that the pragmatic meaning of African worship, as described earlier by Mbiti, is extended into the Caribbean and beyond. Worship within the BLC, therefore, is a primary means of interpreting and making sense of reality in all of its dimensions. As the previous interview respondent explains, it has inherited its pragmatic element:

> ...I might have had a bad day, being faced with such and such; come to church, sing worship...it somehow sheds a lot of the problems for that day...I could even go as far as to write a song to talk about my experiences... I could write a song talking about the trials of society, but then, not just leaving it there but saying how the problem has been solved which is through Jesus Christ.[53]

If worship is to serve a 'functional'[54] purpose, the worshippers need to be fully committed to and involved in the worshipping process. Hence the need for communal and spirit-led interaction is maintained and actively encouraged:

> I think as Black people we're a very lively set of people in terms of music. We love music and we basically enjoy what we do. So when you worship it comes out in the clapping, it comes out in the singing, it comes out in the jumping and the hallelujahs and everything...[55]

The BLC is able to nurture and maintain the act of worship with African features both in its meaning and in its expression. The ways in which the Churches have sought to maintain and secure the retention of this heritage, moreover, has had profound implications for the self-determination of the individual worshippers and their communal organisations.

The above themes as examples underscore the significance of exploring the theme of heritage. It demonstrate that BLCs have maintained some significant links with their African spiritual source. This is an important foundation to lay since it provides an appropriate backdrop from which an analysis of African Caribbean interaction with a European worldview can occur. It begins a contextual narrative, so to speak, in the right place. Furthermore, asserting an African heritage in ACC is a vital means of asserting contextual relevance on the subsequent discussions about

liberation within the BLC in Britain. It will be important to recognise, for example that worship has a distinctive meaning within the BLC experience and that the role of community within the churches directly relates to the inherited African understanding of kinship relations. This backdrop, then, helps to define the particular meaning and expression of liberation within the churches.

Having established a context, however, it is necessary to proceed to the stage of analysing the interaction between the two religious traditions - African and Euro-American - since it is from such a connection that the patterns of liberational expression within the BLC become apparent.

2. Theological and Cultural Syncretism

Theological and cultural syncretism is the second thematic area which characterises the development of ACC and, thereby, the way in which the BLC makes sense of liberation within its current environment. The emphasis on theology and culture is intended to draw attention to the way in which a people understand God and the divine world and express those beliefs through particular cultural manifestations. The emphasis on syncretism is an attempt at describing the nature of the relationship between two distinct theologies and cultures - the one European and the other African - when they come into contact with each other under conditions of extreme social, political and economic imbalance.

Syncretism, here, is understood as being "not a determinate term with a fixed meaning, but one which has been historically constituted and reconstituted."[56] Therefore, although it has sometimes been used to denote undesirable contamination of a 'greater' or 'authentic' theological tradition by a 'lesser', 'impure'

and often 'pagan' one, this is not the meaning which is intended by its use here. Stewart and Shaw[57] have engaged in a very useful debate about the various meanings ascribed to the term within social historical, anthropological and theological traditions, tracing the etymological implications for these various meanings. Rather than repeat that debate here, it will be more appropriate to draw from them some significant concerns which they raise for the current analysis.

Firstly, the term syncretism has been adopted here in its anthropological sense and is used as an appropriate partner to the term heritage, already described. That is to say it has been adopted, not as a critique of the corrupting influences of African religious expressions on an 'unspoiled' Christianity, but rather as part of the wider discussion about the way in which an African religious heritage makes sense of a European Christian tradition. In this sense it is closely linked to an analysis of indigenization as much as of syncretism.

Secondly, the term is used in order to demonstrate, analytically, a relationship essentially between two religious traditions, taking for granted that they consist of more heterogeneous manifestations. For example, African theological and cultural expressions in the Caribbean, were inherited from a diverse range of more specific African traditions from the original West and Central African homelands of the enslaved Africans. Similarly, the Euro-American Protestant tradition reflects a range of missionary traditions, from Moravian to Baptist, and later to Pentecostalism and Sabbatarianism, each representing an autonomous theological and cultural tradition. Nonetheless, it is possible to identify certain general commonalities, previously identified as Euro-American and African 'world views', which support an

attempt to analyse their combination in syncretic rather than multi-cultural terms. This means that one can speak of an Euro-American and African theological and cultural heritage in the Caribbean and from this basis, proceed to examine the ways in which these heritages were combined under the backdrop of slavery and colonialism.

A third point from Shaw and Stewart's discussion is the need to understand syncretism in terms of contextual political processes. This, as they argue, "necessarily involves attending to the workings of power and agency."[58] In identifying ACC as a result of African and Euro-American theological and cultural syncretism, what becomes clear is the way in which it has developed in response to the political and social realities which have confronted it. In the Caribbean and in Britain, the political and social backdrop of the syncretic process has been characterised by both the reality and the memory of slavery, colonialism and racism. The main intention of this theme, therefore, is to identify the effects of these elements on the meeting of the two theologies and cultures. In particular it will understand the ways in which those who have been marginalised by these forces have responded to and found meaning in the syncretic process. This last aim is especially vital since it is in identifying the politics of syncretism that the liberational implications for the theology of the BLC become apparent.

It is, then, the politics of syncretism which returns attention to the paradoxical characteristic of liberational identity within the churches since, as Shaw and Stewart note, syncretic processes can have an ambiguous relationship to hegemony. Since it is indeed the case that "the appropriation of dominance and the subversion of that

dominance may be enacted at the same time, in the same syncretic act"[59] then an exploration of such processes in the Caribbean will provide a useful means of exploring the source of the paradox of liberational identity in the BLC.

Euro-American Theological and Cultural Traditions Within ACC

Having already explored the background to the African contribution to syncretism in the Caribbean, it is appropriate now to overview some of the significant characteristics of the Euro-American contribution. The defining event in this tradition is the Evangelical Revival which took place in Eighteenth century Europe.[60] This revival had seen a theological shift which was accompanied by fresh understanding of the uniqueness of God's relationship to mankind and the special significance of his sacrificial son who was seen as having allowed each individual to relinquish his burden of sin and commence a new and penitent life involving constant and direct communication with God, the loving Father. Such a revelation had placed upon the believer a responsibility not only to respond to God's message of saving grace but also to spread the 'good news' to those who had so far lived their lives in 'darkness'. It was in this spirit that missionary societies were established and representatives sent to foreign fields.

It was also this new emphasis on the value of the individual as a potential child of God that contributed to the ethos behind the religious abolition movement.[61] African 'slaves' were not to be seen as subhuman and, most importantly, soulless articles of property, but as misguided souls who required the sanctifying conversion of God to 'save their souls' and 'bring them out of the errors of their ways.' This last phrase suggests another emphasis of the evangelicals, for whom holy or righteous living

was also to feature strongly within the conversion and sanctification process. This drive towards righteousness acted as a key motivating factor in the work of the missionaries amongst the 'slaves'. An appropriate illustration of this is provided by the missionary John Smith working in Demerara:

> Respecting the moral character of the slaves but little needs to be said. It corresponds to their degraded condition...of honour and decency they have no sense whatsoever. They know nothing of the obligations of truth, honesty, sobriety, chastity etc...the grossest licentiousness is practised by the Negroes all over the West Indies. Indeed, nothing short of a miracle can prevent it until the system of management be altered.[62]

The instilling of moral values identified as consistent with righteous Christian living was a prominent objective of the evangelicals although it was also recognised that many of these erroneous lifestyles were brought about as a result of the external rather than inherent conditions of the 'slaves'. Indeed, in reality, it was frequently the missionary reports sent back to the organisation heads in Britain that served to encourage movement there towards abolition and, in turn, made for a hostile relationship between the planters and evangelical missionaries throughout the British Caribbean Islands. In the context of the islands themselves, the degree to which such hostility was warranted on behalf of the planters is more questionable. The missionaries travelling to the Caribbean were given strict instruction as to the approach they were to take on the issue of emancipation whilst on the plantation. The historian C.S. Reid summarises this view when he notes that "in their preaching and teaching they were careful to avoid even the appearance of inflammatory

remarks, and advocating obedience to the Master in all things legal. They also on any rumour warned strongly against the dangers of rebellion."[63]

This is an important addendum to include here since at the heart of missionary activity in the Caribbean, both during and especially after slavery,[64] the enforcement of a spiritual message and theology was steeped in European cultural values and was intended to serve the broad interests of European imperialism. Missionary theology was, what has previously been described as, *dominant theology*. The spirit of revival which had inspired it, carried with it the baggage of a European heritage founded on hierarchical principles and a notion of intrinsic superiority. In fact, the revival process itself reflected important cultural values of European society with its central focus on individual sin and privatised salvation along with its emphasis on the separation of the secular from the sacred world. It was these values which were, through both intentional and implicit means, passed on by the missionaries through their presentation of the conversion process. Moreover, these were gospel values which were, as Lewin Williams has argued, "most handy for both the colonizing and neo-colonizing processes."[65] He argues that "as long as one was concerned only about one's personal salvation, sin in its institutional form was never a problem. Hence the corporate need and thrusts for socio-economic liberation and self-actualization have never been a priority for missionary Christianity."[66]

Syncretism in Process

The process of syncretism in the Caribbean begins during the period of colonial exploitation and slavery. It involves the coming together of two distinct theological

and cultural traditions, the one representing the oppressed, the other the oppressors.

As noted above, the 'slaves', both African and Caribbean born, had religious beliefs and practices grounded in African cosmology and worship and kinship practices. However they had also, given the conditions in which they had their being, created various mechanisms for survival which involved a combination of pragmatism and adaptation. These survival skills, reinforced by more than one hundred and fifty years of captivity were then applied within the context of Christian conversion and lifestyle with the result that as Huggins has argued:

> Christianity was converted to their needs as much as they were converted to its doctrine...their religion would be their principle defence against the multiple attacks on the slave personality and it would be the chief means of community among slaves, comprising shared experiences and shared values.[67]

The enslaved African, therefore, was drawn to Christianity as part of his or her overall strategy of survival. As C. S. Reid has observed:

> He [the enslaved African] survived because he found means, psychological and physical to resist a system that by its very nature was calculated to destroy him. His daily life was a battle for survival. And his continuance for two centuries through Spanish and British Slavery into freedom is a testimony to his ability to overcome. The history of the slave in Jamaica is a record that shows him constantly trying to *do something* about his unwelcome condition.[68]

The greatest significance of the process of syncretism in the Caribbean is that it demonstrates the extent to which Christianity was accepted by the 'slaves' precisely within this vein of survival in the understanding that with the acceptance of

buckra's[69] faith they would be "doing something" about their condition. Exactly what that "something" was, manifested itself in 'slave' society and in subsequent years within the varieties of African Caribbean Christian expressions as represented by church groups within Caribbean society. Whilst the emerging manifestations were diverse, the initial process of theological and cultural synthesis is one shared by all. In exploring this process of syncretism more thoroughly, it is useful to borrow from Mervyn Alleyne's concept of a "continuum of variation."[70] The result of synthesis for the enslaved Africans was not one homogenous Christian belief system, but rather a range of religious expressions ranging from those heavily African-influenced Myalist groups, to those who adopted a framework which appeared more influenced by traditional European Christian principles and dogma. This variation was represented in manifest expressions from Obeah to Native Baptistism and on further to Euro-American influenced Baptistism and Methodism. What remained common to the varieties was the use of the new faith in order to enhance and in many cases initiate physical and psychological survival techniques. The daily inhumanities of captivity were able to ensure that Christianity maintained a practical application for the 'slaves' that directly related to their physical realities and separated them from the more theoretical stances of their converters, regardless of their humanitarian and benevolent intentions. This was demonstrated, for example, in the influence of liberationary readings of Biblical text in the case of the Sam Sharpe rebellion, as is explored in subsequent themes. However it was also present in less explicitly revolutionary ways in what Raboteau has described as " a testing of wills and a victory of the spirit over the force of brutality."[71] The practical

manifestations of syncretised Christian 'slave' experience has been well observed by writers describing the North American context[72] and there are many parallels in the experiences. One of the most significant practical demonstrations of its effects was the way in which it served to undermine racialised ideology.[73] Both earthly and heavenly masters, for example, demanded uncompromising obedience and absolute devotion. To yield to the former was, for the enslaved African, to capitulate body *and* spirit to a spiritually doomed institution. To yield to the latter, meant life, dignity and ultimate victory. 'Slave' masters, aware of this ideological potential for subversion, were often at pains to discourage this faith. As one 'slave' confided:

> My master would sometimes whip me awful, specially when he knew I was praying. He was determined to whip the Spirit out of me, but he never could do it for de more he whip the more the Spirit make me content to be whipt.[74]

Many 'slaves' were willing to defy their human masters in order to obey their all important heavenly one. Hence, in very practical ways, they not only upheld their own sense of self but also undermined the ideological and often the social control of their owners.

The syncretistic process hinged on a process of adoption and adaptation. This became endemic to enslaved Africans. Christianity was placed firmly within the context of pre-formed religious belief systems and practices. Those aspects of Christianity that were most conveniently suited to these beliefs were adopted and this merger itself was subsequently reinterpreted in the light of existing circumstances. The historian Albert J. Raboteau has identified several factors which served to aid this process; two are worth reflecting on in this present discussion.

The first is what he describes as the "traditional African openness to the "new and foreign."[75] By this he refers to the fact that, particularly in the area of religion, African cultures had been accustomed to a certain resilience in their exposure to alien culture and belief systems and were therefore able to handle the adoption and adaptation processes confidently. The second is an observation borrowed from Herskovits, who pointed out the possibility that "the religious heritage of American [and European] Protestants and the African religious background were not completely antithetical [in that] culture contact was not in every case culture conflict with either Africa or Europe emerging victorious."[76]

The missionary concept of a Supreme God was certainly not unfamiliar to the enslaved Africans and was, therefore, easily accepted by them. What was nearly always of greater meaning, however, was the concept of the Holy Spirit as an empowering force in the lives of those who would yield themselves to its influence. The significance of spirit possession in African religious world views has already been noted. Through the process of syncretism it took its place on a continuum of variation as African spirits were substituted for the Christian Holy Spirit in some religious expressions. Traditional patterns of music and dance as well as dreams and visions within worship, were also adopted into the European Christian experience.[77]

ACC, then, emerged out of the remnants of an African past and the realities of a Caribbean present. The syncretic processes created a continuum of spiritual expressions which were, as Wilmore has argued, "something less and something more than what is generally regarded as Christianity."[78] To return to Stewart and

Shaw's analysis of the term, the religious merger which took place in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Caribbean society should be described as "syncretism from below "[79] in that it was instigated by those who were politically, socially and economically exploited and disempowered. It represented a people's efforts not only to maintain a spiritual memory, but - even more significantly- to employ that memory in the cause of resisting the psychological and physical forces of oppression. Syncretism in the Caribbean demonstrates the enslaved African's ability to assess the benefits and disadvantages of European theology and culture and to accept those elements which could most fruitfully be aligned to the circumstances and cause of his/her disempowered reality. To this extent the emergence of ACC as a syncretised expression of faith can be best understood through the contemporary analysis of Liberation Theology. Gutierrez, for example has argued that:

> "the first act [of liberation theology] is not to develop a theology or create a world view, or do graduate work. Such activities can be components of the "second act", but they will be impoverished and even false to the extent that they have not been informed by the first act, which is not a "head trip" but a "foot trip", to engagement and identification with the poor, the victims, the marginated." [80]

It is with justification then that the process of syncretism, resulting in the creation of ACC should not only be seen as 'syncretism from below', but in so being, it can be claimed as a *first act* of Liberation Theology in the Caribbean.

Whilst the foundation of the syncretic development of ACC can be found on the 'slave' plantations of the Caribbean, however, the syncretic process has not been

limited to that era or location. It has been a continuous feature of ACC both in the Caribbean and in Britain and, in its developing form can best be understood by the themes described below. Continuity and conflict, as well as innovation and conservatism, are appropriate terms for understanding the way in which the Church has continually been affected by syncretistic development. If an understanding of ACC as syncretised faith aligns the religion of the BLC with the *first* act of Liberation Theology, then the above themes comment further on the *nature* of that liberation as it has developed over the years.

3. Continuity and Conflict

This third theme addresses the origins of the twin forces of continuity and conflict within the historical development of the BLC. In so doing it begins to address the source of the internal paradox which has already been identified as a central feature of the Church's nature and of its understanding of liberation.

The concept of *continuity* within the church has already been described under the theme of heritage. It relates to the idea of the *African Soul* and identifies the ways in which ACC belief has maintained links with an African spiritual world view, to greater or lesser extents, through the various points of its development. *Continuity*, however, represents much more than purely cultural retention or heritage. It is an attempt also at describing the way African Caribbean peoples have utilised these cultural resources as part of a struggle to hold on to their self-hood and humanity throughout the countless attacks made against them by the physical and ideological forces of colonialism. This commitment to self is aligned to the theme of heritage since it has been most often through the continued manifestations of that heritage

that this psychological and sometimes physical resistance has come about. Hence when re-creating and participating in kinship relations on the plantation, enslaved Africans were giving themselves the opportunity of reasserting a self and community identity. This was important because it linked them back to a distant African existence and contradicted and denied physical and ideological attempts of the plantocracy to deny them their own humanity; it contributed significantly to the process of self-actualisation and liberation. This was equally true for the relationship of the 'slaves' to holistic worship styles, dreams and visions and all other aspects of their retained African heritage. The spirit of continuity explains why the process of Christian conversion in the Caribbean can be described as one of syncretism; a joining and subversion of faith rather than a holistic acceptance of an alien and often disadvantageous value system. It also explains further why the existence of ACC itself, as a syncretised religious movement, represents a *first act* of Liberation Theology .

The term *conflict* is used here to describe the inevitable clash between the enslaved African's insistence on *continuity* in a context of oppression and exploitation. It indicates that ACC as a syncretised faith did not emerge with the blessings and permission of those who were involved in the conversion process, but rather that it resulted from the rebellious reality of the enslaved subjects of conversion. In this sense it is the direct product of a people's efforts at self determination. When applying the term to the context of the development of the BLC it begins to take on three distinct but related meanings.

The first meaning is that which has been related above. The reality of *conflict* as a dominant theme in the development of ACC demonstrates the commitment of African Caribbean peoples to resist against whatever doctrines or ideologies would threaten their sense of, and commitment to, self worth which is reinforced for them by their link with their African heritage. The development of ACC, therefore, has been symbolised by a relationship of conflict between the impositions of a dominant and often exploitative Euro-American theology and culture and the African Caribbean's desire for continued self-identity.

The second way in which *conflict* has come to symbolise the reality of ACC development is in the continual pressure placed upon faith members to conform to Euro-American interpretations of 'authentic' Christian belief and practice: to convert to, rather than merge, theological and cultural practice. Following Stewart and Shaw's discussion, what, in the Caribbean context, was perceived as liberational by one group was frowned upon as bastardization by the other.[81] It is this manifestation of *conflict* which has encouraged the consistent level of duplicity within both the image and the internal identity of the BLC as it seeks to outwardly conform to an expectation whilst inwardly nurturing an alternative inspiration.

This conflict of interests has been demonstrated in several different ways. In some cases it has been represented by the phenomenon of unofficial dual membership in which believers take on 'acceptable' church membership for the morning but then attend 'real' church, the 'unacceptable' version, in the evening. In other instances, groups actually appropriated established churches to continue to engage in their own style and meaning of worship under an 'acceptable' guise. Such was the case

for the range of Native Baptist Churches who were able to flourish in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries under the guise of the official Baptist denomination.[82] There is evidence to suggest that a similar pattern occurred when Black Seventh Day Adventist members appropriated the dying inner city branches of the British SDA Church during the post-war period of migration, thereby being able to continue to nurture their own expression of the SDA faith under the name of the official British church.[83]

A further illustration of this element of conflict is demonstrated in the way in which many BLC have adopted doctrines and theologies which mimic the accepted, often fundamentalist, approaches of dominant theology but which are reinterpreted through and even counteracted by the spiritual lives of the churches. This is the form of duplicity which is most pervasively represented by the BLC in Britain. It has become such a central part of its psyche that whilst at some point it may have been used as a conscious strategy of resistance, it has since generally become an implicit reality. Consequently it has the most significant contribution to make to an understanding of the Church's contemporary manifestation of a theology of liberation.

The third and final way that the theme of *conflict* is applied here is in order to suggest a certain degree of internal contradiction which exists in the reality of syncretised faith as a source for liberation. It means, for example, that during the creation of ACC, enslaved Africans were called upon to use, as an inspirational tool for resistance and survival, at least the external form of the very theology and culture that was supporting the mechanisms of their oppression. This seeming

paradox, moreover, remains a pertinent conundrum for those who seek to understand the BLC today. The historian James Anyike has argued, "in some strangely evil way, the very teachings that can bring us more life and liberty have been used to do the opposite."[84] This apparent internal contradiction has been the source of much popular mistrust of Christianity within the Black communities.[85] It returns the discussion to the debate about the possibilities for resistance within syncretised religious culture and the opportunities provided by the process of syncretism for believers to move outside of hegemonic domination and control. This is an issue that will emerge in greater detail in the subsequent chapters: however, the question is partially addressed here by the following themes of innovation and conservatism.

4. Innovation and Conservatism

This penultimate theme comes out of the discussion of the nature of *conflict* within the BLC. Since the Church is in a continuous process of syncretic development it constantly responds to all internal and external influences through a process of adoption and adaptation. This, in turn, perpetuates its manifestation of continuity and conflict which reveals itself in theological and cultural developments that are sometimes innovative and at others conservative.

Perhaps the strongest illustration of the innovative response of ACC to its relationship with conflict has been in the arena of Biblical hermeneutics.[86] At the heart of the syncretic process lays an adaptation of the gospel message to the practical circumstances of an oppressed people. This clear appropriation of the meaning of the text took place even before the enslaved Africans were given the

Bible and were encouraged to read it at the schools established by the evangelising missionaries. However, it was able to flourish even further once this latter development had begun to occur.

At the core of this hermeneutical process, was the expression of the fundamental sameness of humanity. It was *all* mankind that was created in the image of God, *all* mankind that stood to gain from the redemptive sacrifice of Christ and *all* mankind that had been presented with the opportunity of meeting with Him in the glorious afterlife. Moreover, this Great and Omnipotent Biblical God was, unlike the lords and masters of the plantation, "no respector of persons."[87] In a social, political and ideological structure which created such extreme divisions between master and 'slave', Black and White, such references took on a distinctly subversive nature.

The Biblical hermeneutics of ACC, both during slavery and after, centred on the concept of a Liberating and Just God. In both the Old and New Testaments, it was the redeeming God who most caught the attention of the victims of oppression. This was the significance of Moses, who under God's guidance was able to emancipate his people from the clutches of a long and cruel captivity. It was the importance, too, of Jesus, who liberated the whole of humanity from its spiritual bondage. God, within the pages of the Old Testament, was a God of justice who poured out His anger on all those who refused to ensure that all "crooked paths [were] made straight"[88] Moreover He was the God who had come to "bring good news to the poor, to heal the broken hearted, to announce release to the captives and freedom to those in chains."[89] The particular hermeneutical approach of ACC has meant that whilst the concept of salvation has remained key to the Christian

experience, it has nonetheless carried with it an understanding and response to the material as well as the spiritual realities of believers.[90] Moreover, although a group's placing on the continuum of variation of Euro-American to African spiritual identity does have a bearing on the specific nature of this hermeneutical approach, the concern with a pragmatic gospel has been a common theme running throughout ACC theological expression. Practical hermeneutics as an act of innovation in approaches to understanding the gospel, therefore, ensured that both during slavery and after, oppressed Africans could keep in focus their own interests even when these contrasted with the desires of the evangelising missionaries.

The most graphic illustrations of this are provided by the Sam Sharpe rebellion, dubbed the Baptist War of 1831 and also Paul Bogle's leadership of the Morant Bay rebellion in 1865.[91] In the former case, Sharpe was inspired by his own reading and interpretation of Biblical text to organise his plantation disruption.[92] The outcome was a pragmatic use of Scripture which served to subvert the missionaries' neutral stance on the material conditions of their converts. As the biographer of Sharpe, C.S. Reid has commented:

> Despite the very careful balancing of the concept of Spiritual and physical freedom which the Baptist Pastors attempted, this Baptist Deacon drew the inescapable conclusion - "I have a right to be free."[93]

Sharpe's autonomous hermeneutics represents a spirit of innovation which existed amongst the new converts. Its distance from the conventional theology of the missionaries is emphasised by the way in which Sharpe and his followers were, in the backlash of persecution that followed the rebellion, at pains to absolve the

English missionary workers of all responsibility. Moreover the value placed on this autonomous spiritual identity by the believers is even further reaffirmed by Sharpe's lack of remorse at his involvement during his trial and sentencing. A Methodist minister, testifying to this inspired determination, observed that "He was such a man too, as was likely, nay certain, had he been set free, to commence another struggle for freedom, for he felt acutely the degradation and the monstrous injustice of the system and was bent upon an overthrow."[94] As Reid has argued, the rebellion therefore illustrates, above all else, Sharpe's " grasp of the deeper implications of the Christian Faith that made him conclude that though he broke the unjust laws of his slave masters he would find forgiveness with God who had made him with the "right to be free." [95] In so doing, it also reflects on the liberational implications for ACC's response to the realities of conflict and continuity.

Hermeneutical innovation demonstrates the efforts of believers to resist against whatever threatens their sense of self and to assert their own humanity through their practical application of scripture. However, to the extent that, in spite of Sam Sharpe, explicit articulation of this hermeneutics, was predominantly disabled by the spiritual environment of the plantation, it also reveals the second form of conflict: the external pressure to conform to European expectations. By way of illustration, one sermon, by a Moravian missionary read as follows:

> Be true to your husbands and wives and obedient to your masters and bombas. The Lord has made all ranks - kings, masters, servants and slaves. God has punished the first negroes by making them slaves, and your conversion will make you free, not from the control of your masters, but simply from your wicked habits and thoughts, and all that makes you dissatisfied with your lot.[96]

Whilst the enslaved congregation may have maintained their own perception of things, externally, they had no option but to demonstrate acquiescence to the sermon-giver and the plantation structures which he represented. In many instances the conservative effects of such a sermon would be modified if not eradicated by the secret and self organised spiritual meetings. For those who could not or did not participate in such alternative spiritual gatherings, the chances of appropriating the spirit of compliance were greater. Duplicity then, also described as the spirit of cunning,[97] finds its source on the plantation. Moreover it is here also that it creates its first casualties since it always carried with it the danger that what was taken and held, temporarily by the believers may, at some point, be absorbed into their consciousness and subsequently come to have an effect on the nature or even the existence of resistance.[98]

Nonetheless, the prevalence of duplicity as an effective and innovative response to the conflict of the conversion process is evidenced in the popularity of those missionary movements, such as those of the Methodists and the Baptists,[99] which provided greatest scope for independent spiritual development. In spite of the efforts of the missionaries to ensure an 'authentic' conversion experience, it was under the auspices of such groups that the believers were able to nurture a spiritual identity influenced by their African heritage and adapted to respond to their oppressed status.

In Jamaica the Baptist church provides an excellent case study for the development of a response to conflict on each of the three levels it has been thus far described. To begin with its overwhelming success demonstrates most clearly, out of all the

missionary movements in operation in the pre-emancipation years, the determination of the enslaved communities to maintain their own sense of self and to strive towards autonomy. It is, for example, not coincidental that the Jamaican Baptist Church was not initiated by a British evangelical but by an African-American 'ex-slave'.

George Liele came to Jamaica in 1783 having already founded the first Black Baptist congregation in America. He was an ordained minister and an experienced evangelist. However his work on the island, as well as that of his associates Baker, Gibbs and Swiggle, clearly demonstrates the power of the duplicitous nature of Black spiritual identity.

There appears to be some discrepancy in the conventional historical portrayal of Liele. Some historians see him in the rather conservative light of a missionary of the established order, suffering persecution "for the gospel's sake" as he committed himself to sharing it with his fellow Africans without challenging their status quo.[100] Others provide a rather more radical image of the 'ex-slave' who came to Jamaica not with an orthodox American Baptist mentality, but with a spirituality that leaned towards the African end of the "continuum of variation." The latter image of Liele makes it is possible to see how his movement was able to lay the foundations for the development of Native Baptist Churches. These were heavily influenced by Myalmen who sought to gain greater acceptance by coming under Liele's branch of Christianity.[101] Alleyne, for example, refers to Liele as preaching "under the banner of Christianity." For which he was severely persecuted since he was seen as "inciting slaves to rebellion."[102]

This seeming ambiguity of Liele himself further serves to reinforce the duplicitous identity of ACC during this period. Moreover it also highlights the way in which the subversive socio-religious identity of ACC can be both subconscious and unintentional. For example, whatever the conscious identity of Liele, his impact on Jamaican spiritual identity was profound. He was an autonomous Black missionary operating not in isolation but, until 1814, with other Black missionaries amongst predominantly 'slave' communities. In this role he was able to encourage and promote leadership and a gospel message that emphasised freedom, if only on a spiritual level. As Gayle observes:

> Liele's presentation of the gospel...made a direct appeal to the heightening of individual consciousness. Talk about freedom from sin was bound to raise questions about being in physical bondage to other men.[103]

Thus, if only unintentionally, Liele's witness in Jamaica continued and encouraged what had become a tradition of self-empowerment and socio-political identity. Moreover, it created the foundations for innovation through duplicity, which was to become the trademark of ACC's expression of liberation.

It has been suggested in the exploration of the previous theme that one of the most prevalent expressions of duplicity in the historical development of the BLC has been unofficial dual church membership. The need for this dual identity was created out of the pressures to conform to external definitions and to internal affirmations of self worth and self-actualization. If this process began with the missionary attacks against African religious heritage, it had become firmly entrenched by the post-

emancipation establishment, confirming a European theological and cultural hierarchy.

With the increased level of missionary activity following emancipation, missionaries were able to consolidate membership of their churches and their church cultures as the desired norm within Caribbean society. In the aftermath of a 'slave' system which had been based on notions of racial and intellectual superiority and colour differentiation, the newly patronised denominations quickly came to reflect the ruling cultural values of the society from which they had emerged. In other words, denominationalism quickly fell under the influence of the class, race and colour factors which stood as central features of the new, post-emancipation, society in Jamaica. The church emerged as arguably the greatest symbol of that social stratification. The Anglicans and Presbyterians were at the top of the hierarchy, servicing the old masters and those, who under freedom, could aspire to wealth and status. At the same time the Methodists became the church of the "coloureds": those former and newly-freed Blacks who were able, through commerce, education and virtue of lighter skin colour, to aspire to middle class status. Finally the Baptists, and under them the thousands of Native Baptists groups, were able to claim the title of 'people's church', through the support and mass membership of 'ex-slaves' who were placed firmly at the bottom of the status hierarchy. In this way dominant theology, whilst perhaps not initiating the system of social and colour stratification that was to become one of the central social structural characteristics throughout the Caribbean,[104] it certainly provided the framework into which such a system could comfortably be embedded. Moreover,

not only was status to be found in the 'right sort' of church membership but Christian membership itself became a key to promotion in the Jamaican social world. Hence Bisnauth writes:

> By the mid-nineteenth century, it came to be felt- even by those people who did not have formal membership with any church - that to be Christian in religion was an important criterion for social worth in the society. The fact that the important people in the society (government officials, school teachers, ministers of religion) were Christian helped to strengthen that feeling.[105]

With the ending of one system of exploitation and control, dominant theology was able to assert itself as an effective replacement. In so doing it intensified the conflict that already existed in ACC between continued heritage and conformity, further increasing the need for dual identity. Even more significantly, perhaps, it also highlighted the central paradox of ACC theological identity: that oppressed believers must look for means of resisting the pernicious effects of Christianity by embracing their own version of that same Christian faith.

The breadth of post emancipation African Caribbean religious history, in fact, unfolds in the consequences of this paradox. It is through the simultaneous move towards independence confined by external influences that the themes of innovation and conservatism emerge. Innovation is the path laid out by Sharpe, Bogle and their followers and by those unnamed believers who applied their faith through a medium of liberational duplicity. In this course arose the potential for radicalism and liberation through the application of African heritage and the spirit of continuity. Conservatism, however, attempts to address itself to one outcome of

conflict within ACC. It describes the impact of external constraints on the various responses of the churches. Conservatism also wrought a critique of the act of duplicity by recognising the limitations of attempting to integrate and embrace an external and oppressive force at the same time as attempting to translate and oppose it.

The theme of conservatism represents the way in which, as Shaw and Stewart have suggested, both resistance and submission can be evident in the same syncretic act. Hence it recognises, for example, that whilst Native Baptist allegiance to the Baptist denomination during slavery may have had liberational benefits, its continued endorsement of that denomination in post-emancipation society could be described more as an attempt at determining social status for its members according to the hegemonic dictates of the new social world. The theme of conservatism is taken alongside that of innovation in order to prompt consideration of the nature of that innovation, asserting that often there has been a thin line between the two.

The result of three levels of conflict emerging out of the syncretic process has been that the development of ACC, and subsequently the BLC in Britain, has run the danger of endorsing reactionary practices even when it has appeared to be resisting them. If missionary Christianity was inextricably interwoven with the cultural, moral and ideological values of the societies to which the missionaries belonged, then as soon as it was implemented as the new yardstick for social worth and accessibility it also confirmed that the people of the Caribbean would be held dependent upon a foreign value system for the development of their identity and

worth. Moreover, with the rise of the US as a major world power in the twentieth century, and with its increasing involvement in Caribbean social, political and religious life, the power of influence has merely been exchanged from European to American hands.[106] Conservatism, therefore highlights this potential for being influenced by wider hegemonic influences whilst nonetheless maintaining systems of belief that encourage independence.

In these ways the processes of innovation and conservatism have, gone hand in hand with syncretistic spiritual development in the Caribbean. It has characterised the continuum of variation of twentieth century religious expression in the same way that it had those nineteenth century missionary faiths. Its paradoxical forces are well demonstrated, for example, in the case of Pentecostalism. This post Second World War American import is as much a symbol of the new cultural imperialism as it is a symbol of resistance to it.

As a religious expression originating from the experiences of oppression[107] Pentecostalism carried with it the mark of adaptability and pragmatism that has been previously described via the themes of heritage and continuity. This was consolidated by the fact that the primary source of evangelism in Jamaica was returnee Jamaicans who themselves had been converted to Pentecostalism in America during the war. Thus, as with the experience of Liele, over a century earlier, the religion was much more easily absorbed into experiences of the believers. However, it is also undoubtedly true that part of its appeal to Jamaicans was the fact that it was foreign and was presented by these returnees who had acquired a new and elevated status by virtue of their connection with America. In

this way the 'conversion' process shared much in common with the European missionary movement for it was not only American religion but also American cultural values and social status that were sought after and exchanged within the 'conversion' experience. It was, indeed, in this way that Pentecostalism was able to contribute to the general move towards modernization within Jamaica.

William Wedonoja, in his study on *Modernization and the Pentecostal Movement in Jamaica,* observes the following regarding the role of the returnees:

> They served as models to emulate and sources of information, leading to a greater public awareness of modern lifestyles and the spread of American values and expectations. Thus the growth of Jamaican Pentecostalism has been largely an indigenous movement of modernization and Americanization.[108]

The term indigenous, in this context, has a similar application to the one syncretism has been given in this chapter, denoting a process of adoption and adaptation. In addition to functioning as a step into the world of social advancement, therefore, Pentecostalism also became syncretised in such a way that it, in itself, was able to serve as a model for the new age. This was particularly the case when it came to bridging the gulf that had been created by the old denominational stratification. The faith, once claimed and adapted by the believers, was able to reinforce the charismatic aspects of those movements that have previously been described as nearing the African side of the continuum of variation, and fuse this with the respectability of the European-influenced denominations. Hence being, as Wedonoja describes, "both indigenous and international," Pentecostalism contributed to the breaking down of class-based denominationalism by creating a

religious experience that offered "both respectable status and popular enthusiasm."[109] In so doing it reinforced the paradox of innovation and conservatism.

These two themes are carried through the development of ACC in the establishment and growth of the BLC in Britain. The potential for innovation, for example, is illustrated by the establishment of the churches both as an act of continuity and as a rejection of what was regarded as ineffective European spiritual systems. The potential for conservatism, on the other hand, is manifested in the influence of dominant theology on the explicit theologies and doctrines of these same institutions. This dichotomy of religious expression, therefore, is a central feature of the development of the ACC and consequently informs the heart of the exploration into liberation and theology in the BLC.

5. Spirituality and Resistance

The final theme of spirituality and resistance need only be given brief attention since it is considered here by way of summarising the previously explored themes. It draws attention to the contextual understanding of spirituality within the ACC experience and thereby highlights the need for careful reading of both theology and spirituality within the structures of the BLC.

Thus far the chapter has attempted to highlight four major thematic concerns of ACC which have been an integral part of its creation and development both in the Caribbean and in Britain. The theme of heritage describes ACC believers as having a cosmological world view which derived from African sources and which was developed amidst the social realities of the Caribbean. Theological and cultural

syncretism explains how this world view served as a base for the indigenization of evangelical Christianity so that nineteenth and twentieth century European and American dominant theology was adopted and adapted to the needs of African Caribbean believers. It also explains how the process of syncretism necessarily resulted in a continuum of variation of ACC religious expression. Continuity and conflict describes the emerging dichotomy created by the need for ACC believers to maintain links with their African heritage and its implicit promotion of self-identity whilst nonetheless relating to the impositions of European and American theology and culture. The fourth theme introduced the twin concept of conservatism and innovation which reveal the outcome of the context of conflict. They relate to both the potential and limitations of resistance and liberation emerging from the experience of syncretism under colonialism.

On reflection what these themes demonstrate is that ACC is a unique religious experience which was born out of an African world view, renegotiated through contact with Euro-American theology, and pragmatically adapted to serve the needs of oppressed African descendants in their Caribbean and British contexts. What also emerges is the centrality of spirituality; Davis' *African Soul,* as an energy centre for resistance and liberation in the context of African Caribbean history. The themes reveal an historical narrative which demonstrate the centrality of spirituality in the day-to-day experiences of African Caribbean peoples. This coincides with Mbiti's observation that "without this spiritual direction or orientation, man would feel lost in the universe and life would seem to have no meaning."[110] However they do not simply comment on the *importance* of spirituality within the contextual narrative,

even more significantly they make an essential observation about the *nature* of spirituality within that context.

If the themes of heritage, continuity and innovation have hinged upon the *spirituality* of Black faith in the Caribbean and Britain, it becomes necessary to reconsider the meaning of spirituality and theology within any discussion of liberation and the church. In other words, the conscious and subconscious practice of duplicity as a response to conflict and continuity has meant that the public face of the Church does not necessarily reflect its internal nature. Therefore the contextual narrative of ACC reveals above all that the most powerful interpretation of a believer's relationship with God comes not from formerly articulated theology but rather through the *experience* of spirituality. In this sense, it has most often been through spirituality rather than theology that liberation has been both defined and implemented. Hence innovative Biblical hermeneutics, the re-working of inherited cultural values and beliefs, the continuation of self identity and definition all have something to say about the way a people perceive their oppressed status as children of God. Such meanings have been expressed through the *experienced* spiritualities of the believers, not so much through their vocalised or written theologies.

While the formal theologies of ACC have developed, in the main, from an attempt to negotiate a co-existence with dominant theology, ACC spiritualities have been characterised by an independent, holistic and pragmatic *experience* of God. Contextual liberation within the ACC historical experience has been spiritual rather than theological although the concept of spirituality within the inherited world view of

ACC believers is such that it incorporates a level of theological understanding; hence we might say that spirituality is experiential theology.

This chapter has emphasized the process of syncretism from below as the first act of Liberation Theology in the historical development of ACC. In so doing it identifies a resistant spirituality at the heart of this theology and this feature is vital for understanding both the potential for, and the limitations of, liberation in the BLC in Britain.

Notes and References

[1] Questionnaire respondent on cultural identity.

[2] Some of the fieldwork carried out for this study was also done from, and within the context of, Jamaican society. (See appendices). Statistics from the Colonial reports on individual territories show that between 1955-61 Jamaica provided the largest majority of migrants into the U.K. with 143,005 in-coming migrants compared with Barbados, the next largest figure, at only 18,741. See Margaret Byron, **Post-War Caribbean Migration to Britain: The Unfinished Cycle**, (Avery, Ashgate Publishing House, 1994) pg. 79.

[3] Davis, op. cit, pg. 50.

[4] Ideology is used here, as it were, with a small 'i', to imply a characteristic manner of thinking.

[5] Mervyn Alleyne **Roots of Jamaican Culture** , (Pluto Press, 1989), Barbara Bush, **Slave Women in Caribbean Society 1650-1838,** (Heinemann Publishers and Indiana University Press, 1990) Lawrence Levine, **Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom,** (Oxford University Press, 1977), Albert J. Raboteau, **Slave Religion, The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South,** (Oxford University Press, 1980).

[6] This debate is perhaps best symbolised by the works of Franklin Frazier, **The Negro Church in America,** (Liverpool University Press, 1964) and **The Negro Family in The United States**, (University of Chicago Press, 1966) who argues on the side of cultural loss and Melville J. Herskovits, **Myth of the Negro Past** , (Beacon Press, 1976) who argues for strong continuities.

[7] Sidney Mintz and Richard Price in the ISHI Occasional paper, **An Anthropological approach to the Afro-American past: A Caribbean Perspective**, (Institute for the Study of Human Issues, Philadelphia, 1981).

[8] Ibid, pg. 7.

[9] Ibid.

[10]Such comprehensive analysis of African spiritual traditions can be found, for example, in the works of Mbiti, op. cit. (1990), also, **Introduction to African Religion,** (Heinemann, 1975) Emefie Ikenga Metuh, **God and Man in African Religion,** (Geoffrey Chapman, 1981), Aylward Shorter, **African Christian Spirituality**, (Geoffrey Chapman, 1978), Geoffrey Parrinder, **African Traditional Religion,** (Sheldon Press, 1974) and **West African Religion: A Study of the Beliefs and Practices of Akan, Ewe, Yoruba, Ibo and Kindred Peoples,** (Epworth Press, 1949).

[11] George Mulrain, *African Cosmology and Caribbean Religion,* in **Caribbean Journal of Religious Studies** (Vol. 10, No.2 Sept. 1989) pgs. 8-9.

[12] Alleyne, op. cit, pg. 7. Alleyne, in fact, goes further than Mintz and Price, in that he advocates the survival of an individual and collective memory in the 'New World' which was able to travel in the consciousness of priests, diviners and other specialist practitioners and thereby ensure the continuation, albeit in a modified form, of whole religions. (see pg. 76).

[13]Barry Chevannes, *Some notes on African Religious Survivals in the Caribbean*, in **Caribbean Journal of Religious Studies,** (Vol. 5, No. 2, Sept. 1983) pgs. 18-28.

[14]Davis, op. cit.

[15] For a detailed exploration of these religious expressions see George E. Simpson, **Religious Cults of the Caribbean: Trinidad, Jamaica and Haiti**, (Institute of Caribbean Studies, 1980), Ivor Morrish, **Obeah, Christ and Rastaman,** (James Clarke & Co, 1982). Also, Alleyne, op. cit.

[16]Phillippo, **Jamaica, its Past and Present State,** as cited in Mary Beckwith, **Black Roadways** (Negro Universities Press, 1929) pg. 159.

[17] See for example Osborne and Johnstone, **Coast Lands and Islands,** (U.T.C.W.I, 1989), pgs. 148-9.

[18]Turner's revolt in Virginia in 1831, was inspired by his religious convictions. Having confessed to receiving dreams and visions from the Lord, he regarded himself in the light of a prophet of Old Testament proportions and this, combined with New Testament apocalyptic images, acted as his sole incentive to rebellion. See Raboteau, op. cit, pg. 164.

[19] Iain Macrobert, for example, describes dreams and visions as being a central part of the Pentecostal leitmotiv. See Badham, op. cit.

[20] Joel Edwards, taken from a recorded interview, London, February 1991.

[21] Bishop Dunn, taken from a recorded interview, Birmingham, August 1992.

[22] Interview respondent, NTCG.

[23] That is to say, the way in which 'unofficial' polygamous relationships exists fairly commonly in the Caribbean.

[24] Mbiti, op. cit, (1990) pg. 102.

[25] For example C.L.R. James, **The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution**, (Allison & Busby, 1980), Alleyne, op. cit. Mintz & Price, op. cit. Also see Alissandra Cummins, *Caribbean Slave Society*, in Anthony Tibbles, (ed.) **TransAtlantic Slavery: Against Human Dignity,** (National Museums & Galleries on Merseyside, HMSO, 1994).

[26]Bush, op.cit, pg. 107.

[27] The terms enslaved African or 'slave' in inverted commas are used within this chapter in recognition of the fact that Africans were 'made into' slaves by an external process. Their status was, therefore, created and not necessarily an innate part of their identity. See the article, *Lets Make a Slave* in **The Alarm**, (Issue. No. 7, July 1994) pg. 14.

[28] As for example, the Coramantee revolt led by Tacky in Jamaica in 1760.

[29] For example in Jamaica, slave laws were passed as early as 1696, to prohibit the assembly of large numbers of slaves on Sundays and holidays. Alleyne (op. cit pg. 82) notes that Obeah was originally practised communally until the eventual acceptance of group worship following the work of the missionaries. Whilst congregations were able to continue their African-influenced practices under the guise of the new Christian faith, the move encouraged the separating out of specialist priest and created the predominance of the lone Obeahman.

[30] Creole, in this context is used to refer to those Africans who were Caribbean born and acculturated during the period of slavery.

[31] The increase of Native Baptist traditions during the period of Baptist missionary expansion is a significant issue in the consideration of African religious retention in the Caribbean and is explored by Alleyne, op. cit. However it is not the intention of this chapter to focus on the range of African belief systems which remain relatively isolated from Christianity if placed on, as Alleyne suggests, a continuum of variation. Rather, the focus, as stated, is to highlight key elements of African heritage which have permeated and influenced even the Christian side of such a continuum and which have implications for the relationship between liberation and the contemporary BLC today.

[32] For example, prior to the establishment of the Baptist movement in the Caribbean, rebellions were usually led by African slaves, in particular, Coramantees, who were able to share both geographical familiarity and religious identity. This had been the case in the aforementioned Tacky rebellion.

[33] See C.S. Reid, **Samuel Sharpe; from Slave to National Hero,** (The Bustamante Institute of Public and International Affairs, 1988).

[34] See for example, Garnet Roper, *The Impact of Evangelical and Pentecostal Religion* in **Caribbean Quarterly,** (Volume 37, No. 1. March 1991) pgs. 45-54.

[35]Pentecostalism first took root in Jamaica in the form of the Church of God in 1907 and was followed by other Pentecostal missions, however, it did not really become widely established as a denominational movement until after the Second World War.

[36] See, for example, William Wedonoja's discussion on the functional nature of Pentecostalism; *Modernization and the Pentecostal Movement in Jamaica* in Stephen D. Glazier, **Perspectives on Pentecostalism - Case Studies from the Caribbean and Latin America,** (University Press of America, 1980).

[37] Anthony J. Payne, in his book **Politics in Jamaica**, (Hurst/Heinemann Educational Books, 1988), argues that Jamaica is one of the few ex-colonies to have successfully developed a strong national identity and a functional democracy. These entities became consolidated during the period of post war modernization and need to be considered as important assertions of a self defined and therefore liberated path. Hence the contributions of Pentecostal community to the readjustments required by the Jamaican working classes at this time were undoubtedly significant ones.

[38] Here I draw upon my own research findings to support such a view; see evidence supplied in this and the following chapter.

[39]Walter Hollenweger, **The Pentecostals,** (SCM Press 1972) pg. 317.

[40]Interview respondent, NTCG.

[41]Interview respondent, SPF.

[42] Mbiti, op. cit (1990) pg. 58.

[43] Mbiti, op. cit (1989) pg. 54.

[44] Ibid, pg. 15.

[45] See Morrish, op. cit. (1982) Chapter 8.

[46] D. Hogg, as cited in Alleyne, op. cit, pg. 90.

[47] For example Morrish, op. cit, observes that amongst the Pocomanians, "the purpose of the singing and physical activity is to produce a rhythm which, in turn, will result in a trance state. In this state various psychic phenomena take place, and the devotees believe that they are taken over by the spirits who speak through them and talk in a variety of 'tongues'." pg. 53.

[48] See for example Anita Jackson's **Catching Both Sides of the Wind; Conversations with Five Black Pastors**, (The British Council of Churches, 1985).

[49] Hollenweger, op.cit. pg. 20, Tomlin, op. cit, (1988) pgs. 97, 119, 127, Macrobert, in Badham, op. cit. Calley, op. cit. pg. 75.

[50] Macrobert, in Badham, op. cit, pg. 124. The reference here to a segregated church relates to the fact that Pentecostalism was born initially out of the multicultural Asuza Street Revival which took place in America in 1906 but rapidly divided along racial lines in its early developing years.

[51] As, for example, the next chapter will demonstrate.

[52] Interview respondent, NTCG.

[53] Ibid.

[54] That is, a social and theological purpose.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Charles Stewart & Rosalind Shaw, (eds.) **Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism, The Politics of Religious Synthesis**, (Routledge, 1994) pg. 6.

[57] Ibid. They engage in a very useful discussion of the nature of syncretism in the introduction to their co-edited volume.

[58]Ibid, pg. 7.

[59] Ibid, pg. 21.

[60] See John Wilkenson, **Church in Black and White**, (Saint Andrew Press, 1993) pgs. 40-42.

[61] For example that led by Wilberforce, Clarkson and Buxton. See the chapter entitles *The "Saints" and Slavery* in Eric Williams' **Capitalism and Slavery**, (Andre Deutsch, 1964).

[62] R. Lovett, **The History of the London Missionary Society,** as cited in Osborne and Johnstone, op. cit, pg. 69.

[63] Reid, op. cit, pg. 50.

[64] See for example Patricia T. Rooke's article *Evangelical Missionaries, Apprentices and Freedmen: The Psychosociological Shifts of Racial Attitudes in the British West Indies* in **Caribbean Quarterly,** (Vol. 25 No.1 1979).

[65] Williams, op. cit, pg. 49.

[66] Ibid, pg. 31.

[67] N.I. Huggins, **Black Odyssey: The Afro-American Ordeal in Slavery**, (Vintage Books, 1977) pg. 175.

[68] Reid, op. cit, pg. 34.

[69] A term used by the slaves to describe their master.

[70] Alleyne, op. cit. Alleyne argues that the most useful way of perceiving Jamaican culture is as a "continuum of variants" which account for its "cultural differentiation." pg. 4 He believes that it is not possible to detach, as some have tried to do, the historical identifies of groups in the Caribbean, from the contemporary plurality of the island. Since his focal argument is that culture itself is a continuum (pg. 7), he uses this model to apply to a range of cultural phenomena including language and through this means assesses the degree to which such elements are both experienced and developed.

[71] Raboteau, op. cit, pg. 308.

[72] See for example Franklin, op.cit, Levine, op. cit, Raboteau, op. cit, Wilmore, op. cit.

[73] For example, the plantocracy racism and pseudo scientific theories and religious theories of racial inferiority which predominated the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. See Fryer, op. cit. Although much of these debates concerning race took place in the British context, the implications of popular beliefs were nonetheless inspired by, amongst other things, the need to justify the treatment of the 'slaves' on the plantations and to control their desire to resist.

[74] Cited in Raboteau, op. cit, pg. 307-8.

[75] Raboteau, op. cit. pg. 51.

[76] Ibid, pg. 58.

[77] Alleyne, op. cit, pg. 87-8.

[78] Wilmore, op. cit, pg. 1.

[79] Stewart and Shaw, op. cit, pg. 22.

[80] Brown, op. cit, pg. 51.

[81] For example, the Presbyterian missionary, William Jameson described Moses Baker (one of Liele's assistants) as having misguided knowledge of the Christian faith and "absurd superstitions". See Bisnauth, op. cit, pg. 176 This was not, by any means, an unusual reaction.

[82] See Alleyne, op. cit. pg. 90.

[83] Evidence based on research transcripts, see chapter four.

[84] James C. Anyike, **Historical Christianity African Centered**, (Popular Truth Inc. 1995) pg. 170.

[85] For example in the above reference, Anyike seeks to confront and dispel what he regards as the popular Black-held myth that Christianity is the 'White man's religion'. This was also the partial reasoning behind the rejection of Christianity by the Rastafarian movement.

[86] This is particularly evident in slave uprisings such as that by Sam Sharpe, see Reid, op. cit. Also, Wilkenson, op. cit pg. 43 and Horace Campbell, **Rasta and Resistance: From Marcus Garvey to Walter Rodney**, (Hansib Publications, 1985) especially the section on *religion and resistance*, pg. 26.

[87] Acts 10 v. 34 (King James Version).

[88] Isaiah 40 v. 4, ibid.

[89] Ibid, 61 v.1.

[90] The link between Biblical hermeneutics and a liberational Black Theology on the slave plantation has been explored, in particular, by American theologians. See for example James H. Cone, **The Spirituals and the Blues,** (Seabury Press, 1972) Dwight Hopkins and George Cummings **Cut loose Your Stammering Tongue, Black Theology in the Slave Narrative,** (Orbis 1991) and Earl Riggins, **God, Self and Community in the Slave Mind**, (Orbis, 1993).

[91] Bogle's position is cited as an illustration of the nature of spirituality in ACC in the concluding theme.

[92] For example Reid, op. cit, describes Sharpe's use of texts such as " No man can serve two masters" (Matthew 6: 24), "If the Son shall make you free you shall be free indeed", (John 8: 36) and "Ye are brought with a price: be not ye servants of men" (I Corinthians 7:23) in order to justify his rebellious activity. (pg. 60).

[93] Ibid, pg. 61.

[94] Ibid, pg. 93-4.

[95] Ibid, pg. 103.

[96] J.E. Hutton, **A History of Moravian Missions**, as cited in Bisnauth, op. cit, pg. 124.

[97]Bisnauth, op. cit, pg. 97.

[98]For example Bisnauth cites the example of the Methodist and Moravian converts in Antigua who, in 1795 were trained and armed to fight against the threat of invasion from the French who, as he describes were "fighting under the banner of Liberty! Equality! and Fraternity!" See pg. 127-8.

[99] By 1814 Baptists had 8000 converted members and this figure had more than doubled to 20,000 by the time of the Sam Sharpe rebellion. A Jamaican census taken in the early 1840s reveals church membership figures at 18,000 Anglican, 25,500 Methodist and 33,650 Baptist. The Moravian Church trailed behind at only 4,000. Figures taken from Osborne and Johnstone, op cit, pg. 133.

[100]This is certainly the portrait provided by the Jamaican Baptist Union. See for example Clement Gayle, **George Liele, Pioneer Missionary to Jamaica**, (Jamaica Baptist Union, 1982).

[101] For example Alleyne, op. cit, cites Gardner **A History of Jamaica**, as illustrating a connection between Liele and Baker and the Myalmen. pg. 89.

[102] Ibid, pgs. 96-7. He argues "the Baptist alone among churches, were willing to grant positions of leadership to slaves, and Myalmen seized the chance to set up their own "churches" where they could practise their forms of worship and celebrate their beliefs under the guise of Christianity." pg. 97.

[103] Gayle, op. cit, pg. 39.

[104] Davis, op. cit, pg. 25.

[105] Bisnauth, op. cit pg. 210.

[106]This situation has largely occurred as a result of the geographical closeness of the Caribbean to America coupled with the rise of America as the new world power and its self imposed role as world policeman. Kortright Davis, op. cit, has identified the twin forces of a plantation economy; exploitation and domination and he argues that America has kept this tradition alive in the Caribbean region through the processes of economic domination. Much of this has taken shape in the new tourism industry which he describes as the new plantation economy having largely obscured most former agricultural production. Thus, not only has the region become heavily dependent on America for its food but also, for the cultural norms and, most significantly, the all powerful American dollar, that makes the tourist industry possible. Thus the US has become the new absentee landlord of the Caribbean and the exploitation and domination of colonialism continues.

[107] Its founder, William Seymour had been born just at the ending of slavery in America and had grown up within the experience and life force of the Black Churches.

[108] Wedonoja, op. cit, pg. 36.

[109] Ibid, pg. 37.

[110] Mbiti, op. cit.

CHAPTER FOUR: LIBERATION AND THE BLC IN BRITAIN

> ***The Church makes you know that you are fulfilling your purpose on earth...the Church gives you that sense of pride in your culture and in who you are in society. It didn't take the Church for me to appreciate my Blackness but it does set you apart...The Church is my strength to go on...As a Black person in society you need your faith, your own self can't provide that, you can be the most strongest willed person but something's gonna shake you and when that happens you need something more to lean on***[1]

Having explored the themes which, throughout history, have made a central contribution to the development of the BLC, this chapter focuses on the meaning and expression of liberation as manifested by the British and Black Led development of ACC. The criteria which will be used to determine the existence and nature of liberation within the Churches are drawn from the paradigms of Liberation Theology explored in chapter two. It is the purpose of the remaining chapters of this study to interrogate the six measures for Liberation Theology - which concluded that chapter- with regard to the context of the BLC in Britain.

The process begins in this fourth chapter with an analysis of the first two of those criteria These were (A) Liberation Theology is a contextual theology and (B) Liberation Theology is an holistic theology.

The primary sources of information which will be used here to consider these conditions for liberation are fieldwork findings obtained from the observation, interview and questionnaire work. It will be a useful preliminary exercise, therefore, to identify in greater detail, the nature of these findings.

The access questionnaire which was utilised in each of the Churches received responses from an equal number of men and women. These were predominantly completed by white-collar and lower professional workers involved in health care, teaching, computing or clerical work. Others were self-employed, studying or retired while only a very small number were unemployed or involved in manual work. The questionnaires themselves were used as an aid to qualitative research in order to understand the kinds of views present amongst Church-goers. They were not intended to provide quantitative data: as can be seen in appendix 1, the questions were open-ended and allowed respondents to provide information and discuss their ideas in a similar form to the structured in-depth interviews which were undertaken. The thirty-eight completed questionnaires should therefore be seen as an extension of those interviews, allowing the inclusion of more opinions than interviews alone would permit and contributing to the collection of narrative testimonies upon which this study has been dependent.

Most of the respondents had been Christians for ten or more years and half of them had been members of their particular Church for the same period of time. Although just over half of them had been born in Jamaica and migrated to England during the 1950s and 60s, only a very few of them had held previous membership of a Traditional British Church before joining their current Church.

The five denominational groups were covered by the narrative responses of 40 British-based and 11 Jamaican interviews,[2] 38 questionnaires and the observation of 13 recorded services and events. In spite of their differing origins, sizes, backgrounds and doctrinal emphases, the groups share in common, (albeit to

differing degrees) the formational themes which were explored in the previous chapter. The introductory questionnaires, interview responses and observation work carried out among these groups provided significant data from which to formulate an evaluation of the extent to which ACC, through the BLC, embraces a theology of liberation in Britain.

A. Liberation Theology as Contextual Theology

It has been observed, thus far, that in order for a theology to be liberational it needs to be responsive to its own particular circumstances, developing a theological understanding that emerges out of the social, economic, political and spiritual needs of the people whom that theology serves. It should not uncritically embrace a theology imposed upon it by a source that does not share its same material standing, but should instead nurture a unique contextual understanding of, and relationship to, God.

The preceding chapter has also observed that ACC has, since its syncretic creation, developed in several key thematic areas. Each of these themes or influences have enabled the BLC to create and nurture a distinct identity. It is this, as has already been explored, which has become most manifest in the spirituality of the Churches. Therefore it is appropriate to claim that the spiritual development of the BLC has been contextual and, in this way, liberational. Such a nature is currently manifested within the structures of the Churches through several distinct characteristics.

These characteristics have facilitated the Church's role as both social and spiritual liberator for its adherents. Indeed, so expert has it become in this position that the qualities which once were deliberate attempts at self preservation in a hostile

environment have, subsequently, become a permanent part of the internal structures of the BLC. As such they have served in less explicit ways to provide a haven for African Caribbeans in Britain. As Bishop Dunn has explained:

> The Church over the years has been a sanctuary for the Black community in the face of many dangers and prejudices and has served as a succourer for the physically uprooted, the emotionally displaced, the socially and culturally bereaved and the spiritually bankrupt.[3]

As part of a wider spectrum of African Caribbean organisations within Britain, the BLC is perhaps uniquely highlighted by this historically developed internal structure, evident not only in the hierarchy of leaders, departments and auxiliaries that contribute to the internal ordering of the Churches, but more so in the often unwritten theological belief system and the very active spiritual behavioural patterns that support it. This is what contributes to the liberational spirituality of the ACC as manifested by the BLC in Britain.

Liberational spirituality represents the heart of the Church. It is very often what places it most explicitly on the African continuum of variation. It emerges from the internal structures of the BLC in the form of several pervasive characteristics through which believers are served. These can be summarised under the rubrics of *1. community, 2. identity, 3. encouragement, 4. personal development, 5. direction/authority,* and *6. incentive/hope.* They represent an unspoken life-force within the Churches which is very rarely given conscious attention by the believers themselves. Nonetheless these traits serve as essential vehicles through which their faith is allowed to develop and serve their social interests. The six

characteristics were identified during fieldwork; while there exists slightly different emphases in the different denominations, all of the rubrics proved to be core elements of each Church group. As such they can be considered key to the nature of the BLC. Although taken as separate headings, they necessarily are interrelated.

1. Community

The importance of community in the spiritual life of the BLC has already been identified in the exploration of heritage. The characteristic of community has successfully followed the development of the BLC from its origins on the oppressive plantations of the Caribbean through to the hostile environment of a discriminatory British society. In so doing it has contributed significantly to the cause of liberation for ACC believers.

In this study there has already been some description of the ways in which membership of the BLC involves access into an active family network and how this is often a motivating factor for those who choose to become involved within the Churches. Each church is considered to be a family which carries with it its own rules and regulations but which simultaneously offers its members a sense of stability and belonging. Perhaps most importantly of all, the BLC provides a base from which to confront the difficulties of life in the knowledge that one is protected by a solid mutual support network.

It was once argued that the BLC could be regarded most appropriately as a sect because it recruited by voluntary association rather than natural increase.[4] If such a label was appropriate in the early days of the Church, it is most certainly now redundant. Research conducted for this study showed that membership was

recruited mainly from the youth of the Church or from adherents and family members. The following five circumstances of membership were the most frequently cited[5]:

1. Being brought up in the church;
2. Conversion at a church camp, prayer meeting or convention;
3. Conversion after self/life reflection;
4. Conversion involving dramatic intervention of spirit activity; and
5. Conversion following influences of a partner, friend or family.

From each of these experiences the individual is brought into a community of believers and takes on membership of a mutual support system. In this way community responsibility within the Church was frequently cited by interview respondents as an explanation for their presence and participation within their particular organisation. Moreover, responsibility to the church community is regarded not simply as a personal decision but as a God-given calling. It is also a tangible way in which a community sharing mutual disadvantage within society at large can create an environment of solidarity and support. This feature is generally perceived as lacking within Traditional British Churches or even within the predominantly White branches of churches which have subsequently become Black. The following interviewee, for example, joined the SDA Church on his arrival from Jamaica in the 1960s but soon became discouraged and left. On returning to the Handsworth branch he discovered a completely reformed experience in the church which had become, according to the definition previously provided, a BLC:

> I found the people more loving, more willing to listen and to co-operate with each other. So it was a matter

> of me finding the church more settled than when I left it. People in general are helping people, as Black people. They are thinking about their future, they're helping their kids. People are more understanding.[6]

This co-operative spirit is something that was identified within all of the churches in which interviewing took place. It is something which takes relationships beyond those dictated by shared religious belief. As one interviewee put it with regard to her place of worship at the SPF: "there is a family relationship...its more than just a church, its like a community." The conversion experiences by which individuals are recruited into full membership of the Churches involve full interaction within this church family or community. So it is from such beginnings that members are able to consolidate their initial encounter of unity through their active participation in the spiritual life of their church. Calling congregation members 'brothers' and 'sisters' is more than a habit or informality; it consolidates working relationships within the Church.

Furthermore, such consolidation forms a response to both material and spiritual needs and is often demonstrated through financial assistance. For example, within most of the Churches an official or informal programme is operated in order to help young people who wish to study away from home. Very often this takes the form of financial gifts, but it also links the students with members from particular Church regions. The aim is to assist the host member with accommodating, allocating and enabling the young person to adjust themselves to their new local church and social environment. Another illustration was found in the spontaneous collections made for sick or suddenly disadvantaged members, most of whom were elderly or very young

children. In fact, most of the community services now offered by the Churches began their existence as a natural part of the internal community care and responsibility programmes.

The community spirit that is introduced at conversion is subsequently reinforced by the structural programme of the Churches, both in its annual agenda and in its week-to-week itinerary. All of the Churches have a full programme of events which encourage interaction amongst their memberships. Primarily this takes the form of the branch church auxiliaries such as those for women, men and youth fellowships, evangelism/mission committees, and children, youth and senior choirs in addition to the mid-week Bible and prayer meetings. In these ways communication and support are extended for each member throughout the week. The community is given opportunities to develop, as one interviewee observed:

> I've been into the men's meeting and those are some of the issues you're talking about...you know, spiritual stability and helping them to cope with some of the oppressive forces of society and institutions. So I feel yes, its not planned consciously, but I think its almost like self-help; natural self-help.[7]

Local or branch meetings are combined with a range of conventions, conferences, concerts, mission and camp meetings which encourage interaction with other churches of the same denomination[8] within the local West Midlands region and, at least once a year, with the national - and sometimes the international - network of Churches. Consequently a sense of belonging is not restricted to the believer's own local church branch, but rather is extended to a much broader community of like-minded, self-supporting believers who are both responsible for as well as

responsible to each other. Moreover, it should be emphasised that such links are not superficially or informally maintained, as it were, on paper, but rather are sustained and encouraged by regional and national leaders and co-ordinators. They are further reinforced by frequent exchanges and visits between ordinary members and an increasing range of projects which require joint aid or practical and spiritual support. One significant example can be seen in the collective efforts towards the purchasing of a 3000-seater convention centre in Sandwell by the FUCJCA.

To describe the engendering of a community spirit as one of the central characteristics of the BLC is not to suggest that the Church has no divisions or discord, or that it is purely beneficial to all of its members at all times. What it does suggest, however, is that, firstly, the spirit of communal identity is a consistent and long-standing feature of the African heritage of the BLC. Secondly, it suggests that, as such, its primary effect is to contribute on an individual and congregational level to the struggle to undermine the impact of oppression amongst the members who are served by it. It is, in other words, a central contributing factor to the liberational spiritual identity of the BLC.

This factor is especially salient since the community is often formed on the basis of cultural similarity. Although this factor was rarely brought out in an explicit manner, it was nonetheless made evident in numerous responses. For example, as one Pastor argues:

> Well, we are Black and our culture from the Caribbean is as we are...They [BLC] serve their people although a few White people may be sprinkled in it...Each group is able to serve their group best...they say birds of one feather flock together.[9]

On an holistic level it can be said that a major characteristic of the BLC is the provision of a culturally-specific community identity amongst its adherents. This serves to reassert a togetherness that is sometimes lost by the harsh competitiveness present in society and it also provides access into what is simultaneously an intricate and yet solid network of material, spiritual and social support.

2. Identity

A sense of community is one of the major aspects of the identity that the BLC offers its adherents. Indeed, a specific cultural identity was clearly evident in both the questionnaire and interview responses.

In response to questions which related to their cultural backgrounds, although most respondents thought of themselves as being British they nonetheless used labels such as Afro/African Caribbean, West Indian or Black British to describe themselves. This was particularly true of those younger people who had been born in Britain. Far from being inconsistent, this response clearly stemmed from a practical effort to cope with life in British society. Young people were anxious to express their right to the full entitlements of British citizenship and, therefore, in this respect to identify themselves as British while retaining a lifestyle that was culturally distinct from what they regarded as British. For example[10]

> Yes I am British because I was born in Britain, however I still feel it necessary to hold on to cultural aspects of my roots.
>
> Yes, for nationality purposes but not within my heart. I may do things like other British people do but I do not adapt a British culture.

> I am British by right of birth here yet I am denied full acceptance. As a result my Blackness is also important. I am not Jamaican because my life has not been spent there but I am proud of my Blackness which has its start and history in Jamaica.
>
> ...To be British you have to be White. I'm Black and I'm born in Britain so I don't fit the mould; the choice isn't there...I've got a British passport but as I drive my car I'm stopped at 3 am in the morning. Its presented as if I'm aspiring to White middle class values, but that's not true, White people do not set standards, they borrow standards.
>
> I'm British when it suits me, but I'm Black...But don't call me English.

In this way 'British' is used almost as a political term while cultural allegiance and experience remains Caribbean-orientated with occasional selected influences from Britain:

> I think of myself as British born but I am wary of classifying myself as British. I like to think of myself as someone who straddles the Caribbean and Anglo Saxon cultures fairly successfully. Using the Norman Tebbit cricket test I would add that I am possibly of no fixed culture, as I shout for any Black person who either earns my admiration or needs my support.

The above response is particularly interesting since it demonstrates the allegiance to racial as well as cultural identity. Older respondents also identified themselves as British for implicitly political reasons while relating to cultural and historical bonds that were far removed from British cultural realities. Particularly interesting was the way many of these older respondents, at times even more so than the younger ones, alluded to an African homeland and connection:

> Africa is where my ancestors came from and God teaches me that to know Him is to know myself. I

> must, therefore, accept my roots; beautiful or ugly as it may be. But Britain is a country that wants Black labour, talent, wealth but not our presence. So I cannot accept Britain as my country. I'm here for what I can get back.
>
> ...the British do not really accept my Blackness and I'm proud of my roots.

The above reveals an understanding that was manifested repeatedly in a variety of forms throughout the fieldwork. Defiance to racist rejection was evidenced by the determination to identify as legally British even though in practice people had a cultural experience and lifestyle that was not British:

> I see myself as British because I was born in Jamaica when Jamaica was ruled by the British so that makes me a British subject. Anyway, deep down I know that I am African, trapped in a certain part of this world so that's why being a Christian, one is sure of where one is going.

This response reveals that the issue of identity for the BLC believer is one in which Christian and cultural allegiance is inextricably intertwined. Hence the characteristic of identity as a core feature of ACC expression reaffirms the contextual and therefore liberational nature of its spirituality.

The function of identity extends that of community whilst sharing with it many aspects in common. In addition to the sense of family interaction, believers are able to discover in the Church a source of cultural and social identity which enables them to learn, consolidate and pass on their cultural values. In this way the institution acts as a significant point of reference for the collective self-perception of the body of believers for the continuation of self-awareness and esteem. This is something which is not considered possible within other spiritual or secular contexts:

> The fact that I am Black, that immediately spells danger or a problem to White people and the British society. From the beginning of Black presence in Britain, I believe we have been treated unequally.[11]
>
> I think there is suspicion and hostility as well as a feeling of superiority in the Traditional Churches.
>
> Only a few White Traditional Churches will accept Black people as equally the same, having spoken to Black Church of England Christians.[12]

Within the BLC respondents saw themselves as belonging to a community of believers who shared in common an understanding of God, a cultural background and a racialised identity along with an experience of hardship, rejection and racism within a secular society. The Church is considered, therefore, a place to meet together in order to celebrate, develop and reinforce one's understanding of God in a context which (without conscious effort) also celebrates, develops and reinforces the culture and self-worth of the believers. Through this combined strength, the individual is enabled to tackle the external issues confronting him/her in the realties outside of their church.

When asked, for example, whether it was important to have BLCs most respondents believed that it was, and a high proportion of them cited general cultural differences as their explanation:

> So Black people can express their needs among people that understand them.
>
> What would happen to our younger generation when they are rejected by the White community?

The questionnaire responses also suggested that many people worshipped in a BLC for reasons to do with their ability to identify with it. A range of explanations

were provided by respondents for their presence in the Churches including being born into the church, being converted into the church and enjoying the worship of the church. However, again, the most common response related to issues of identity[13]:

> I am among my own people. I feel at home. I do not feel I need to compete or that I'm not good enough.
>
> It enables me to relax into my Blackness.
>
> I feel it is one of the ways I keep my Black identity and I feel better opportunities to develop spiritually and contribute to my own Black people.
>
> I would chose a Black Church because I am Black.
>
> I enjoy being amongst people who are coming from the same background as myself.

Clearly cultural similarity facilitated the worship and appreciation of God:

> I think one of the advantages is that in terms of culture you can identify with each other; there is that common element, being Black...You can identify with the culture, you've got more or less the same experiences and we've all got something in common and you feel at home, at ease...I feel more at ease with a Black Church.[14]
>
> I wanted to be with my own. When I look back now at what happened at the White Churches, as nice as they were, there was always the thing that they were looking after you, it was more paternal...At a Black Church you just felt that you were the same as everyone else, to be with your own kind you don't feel ill at ease.[15]

Such issues were especially apparent in the responses of Church pastors and leaders who felt that in addition to spiritual guidance, the Churches also offered a

socio-spiritual identity for their believers, and that this was something that applied equally to old and new members:

> As I have said, most of the people who come to us are from the Caribbean and these are some of the strong views of people within the Caribbean. And so, because we are presenting something that they can identify themselves with that is one of the things, I think, that draws them. For those that are born here...we notice that a lot of them are coming from the same sort of background and so we are presenting something that they can identify with.[16]

Moreover, identity was not only an initial attraction for members but was also something that was actively encouraged and fostered by the leadership in most of the Churches. Pastors expressed a desire for their congregants to feel part of a spiritual community of believers who were also identified by a specific cultural heritage:

> Some Christian Churches feel that once you become a Christian you drop your identity. I don't agree with that otherwise Israel would have been wiped off the map years ago. But God deliberately wanted that place to be there and I believe that history, identity and culture is very important to people so I interweave that in my talks with young people and I ask them to be very proud of where they come from.[17]

This view was certainly one which was shared by all of the pastors interviewed. Although not all believed that they could be identified accurately as a Black Church, all were in agreement as to the necessity of nurturing an identity that met the cultural realities of their congregations. Hence, for example, one pastor[18] explained how his church had clearly accommodated itself to the cultural identity of its

members in spite of the fact that as part of a wider institution he would not feel comfortable describing it as a BLC.

Identity also forms a relevant part of the Church experience in the sense that it sometimes provides a major inspiration for the development of cultural values and norms. As one respondent explained:

> This is the only place where I mix with majority Black people, all the other times its White people and as a Black person, its really important for me to mix with Black people who came over from the West Indies; who have survived in an alien environment. And just to be with people who come from a background that I want to keep hold of and use as I go forward, and that I want for my kids...you know that you're a Black person and there's something really rich and important in that.[19]

In this way identity provides more than cultural comfort; it enables a renewal of perspective in the believer and a subsequent elevation of self-expectation and vision, transferring the individual from the invisibility of minority status to being part of a mainstream which has relevance and inspirational value. Therefore, not only is a like minded community of believers able to strengthen one another by mutual acceptance and validation, but also, on an educational level, the Church provides a pool of experienced teachers from within its own membership who have themselves created part of the tradition of struggle and resistance that contributes to the cultural flavour of the Church and perpetuates self-development. This was something that respondents were well aware of and were, therefore, able to manipulate for maximum advantage:

> Black Led Churches usually mean the majority of the congregation is going to be Black...so more or less, you're sharing with like people...You can relate to

> anyone but at the same time, yes, the Church definitely has contributed to keeping the cultural ties.[20]

> ...coming into a Black Church opened my eyes to Black girls and Black pastors which was a different phenomenon. So there was a re-education going on in my own mind. Going to a church where you heard Grenadans, Barbadian, Jamaicans talking together was a positive step for me and that then affected me in the choosing of my partner. My Blackness was heightened.[21]

> I think you need to identify yourself somewhere because I feel if we fully accept the British way then we are losing our identity and we are actually agreeing with them saying Black people don't have any history, and there's a strong history.[22]

A cultural identity is not only seen as compatible with a spiritual identity, but in reality, inseparable from it:

> The culture in the Church is the same as the culture in the home, so that includes worship, our testimonies, the way we sing, the way we rejoice...its our culture that we have in common.[23]

> My Christianity goes side by side with my culture...They say that Black people are emotional; fair enough, we've had a lot to be emotional about. I'm an emotional being. I'm Black and what happened years ago has affected me.[24]

This identity was not intended by the believers to shut out those from other cultures. It is likely in order to avoid this impression, that there is an apparent reluctance to admit explicit cultural allegiances. It is meant, rather, as an assertion of independence and as such is part of a practical application of survival technique:

> Yes it would be nice for everyone of all colours to worship God, that's the ideal and we should work towards that. But the bottom line is that's a very hard ideal to work towards. So for me, I'm quite happy to be

> in a Black Church. I'd find it quite difficult to function in a White Church.[25]

The significance of identity as a central characteristic of the contextual response of the Church is that it is a matter of personal and conscious association. It expresses the determination of the believer to negate his/her own marginalisation in society and in Traditional British Churches as well as to assert self-value by caring for individual needs. In providing such a space for mutual recognition and celebration a distinct identity continues a heritage of continuity of self in response to conflict. This creates a platform from which can be launched a fervent attack against the negative impact of marginalisation and invisibility. This is achieved through the collective assertion and vocalisation of a shared cultural experience.

3. Personal Development and 4. Leadership

These two characteristics are closely interrelated and are, therefore, more appropriately considered together. They refer to the manner in which the Church, through its fostering of both community and identity, also provides a service that caters for the advancement of its members in matters concerning their educational, spiritual, social and psychological well being.

Community and identity provide a formal structure for the creation of leadership and guidance qualities. This guidance is itself multi-functional. It boosts confidence, gives direction and provides incentive for progress in both the spiritual and social world:

> For me personally, church is a help. Through my experiences from day-to-day I've got people I can turn to for certain issues and they can give me help on certain matters...For me personally, I get guidance in my daily life, in how I cope with situations I might come

> across, as a Black person, and I might not know how to deal with it but probably an elder would be able to assist me.[26]

Whilst there were, as is indicated above, overt or tangible ways in which the guidance factor proved effective in the lives of members, Black leadership also assisted believers in conceptual ways. Role models, for example, were able to negate the suppositions of a racist society and the impact of internalised oppression:

> Black people need to get out of the mentality where they think if its White its right. We must realise that we can do things ourselves. If we continually have White leaders I wonder if we are simply being submissive and we are there just to receive instruction and behave ourselves in a way that is acceptable to Whites. When you have a Black pastor it means that you have a Black Church, led by a Black person for Black people.[27]

Clearly, the benefit of Black leadership is as much one of identification with the congregation as it is one of leadership of the congregation as one respondent illustrated when speaking of her pastor:

> The advantage is that being Black he's coming from roots he understands. He knows what his congregation needs, he knows how to deal with them. He knows how to sit and talk things that would befall them...Do you think that if our pastor wasn't Black he could have kept that congregation as he has? Because the young people might have gone, but its a few of our young people that have walked out...They can talk with him, he shares their views and their understanding. He speaks their language. He speaks the children's language and he speaks the adult's language...He's a wise man under God's order...He's a pastor that feeds the flock, the pastures are always green.[28]

Another congregation member reflected similar feelings:

> Pastor Corbett is Black...I know where he's coming from. I can identify with his preaching; it touches my soul and he ministers to me basically.[29]

The first response is particularly interesting since it highlights the way in which a pastor's spiritual qualities as a leader who "feeds his flock" and whose "pastures are always green" are identified as inseparable from the fact that he also comes from "roots" which his congregation are able to understand and relate to. Spirituality, then, is not separate from, but an integral part of, the believer's social and cultural existence. The cultural presence of the Black pastor is able to "touch the soul" of the Black believer. This is something which was also brought out in the responses of many Church leaders. Pastor Thompson, for example, spoke of the advantages of a spirit led minister with a Black congregation:

> He ministers to people and they are helped, they are ministered to then the advantage is that the ministry is fruitful; whether its healing, salvation, counselling, whatever, as long as it lifts that person from the area where they were and takes them to a higher plain...[30]

The minister has an explicit duty to recognise and address the needs of his/her congregation and this will inevitably lead to him or her confronting the realities of life within a society that places them at a social and ideological disadvantage. For each pastor interviewed, this involved counselling for, and encouraging the development of, self-worth amongst especially the young:

> One of the things I found out unfortunately among some of our Black people, they seem to have that same colonial mentality about themselves, where they lack self confidence, they do not see within themselves the ability to take up leadership roles; not just within the Church but in society. Now I'm leading a

> Black congregation where I have the opportunity to teach these people, let them realise their self worth, that they have potential, that you're equal to the White man and you can have the same attainment that they have. So I see that as a great responsibility.[31]

Leaders aimed to equip their membership to deal with material realities by applying spiritual means through a variety of media. The central method, however, involved a process of testifying to the power of God in the current circumstances in the lives of the believer. As Pastor Gray continued:

> I just thank God for the Black Churches because I don't know what would have happened to some of our youngsters. Because when you go into some of the churches and see the young people...to me its a refuge, otherwise they would be on the street like others - on drugs and these sort of things, so I thank God for them.[32]

Belief in an after life was able to strengthen determination to succeed spiritually on earth and, in accordance with African heritage, the spiritual consciousness of the believers could not be fully realised without confronting social realities:

> If you are a pastor of people then the welfare of people must matter apart from going to heaven. Because you must remember that you are going to heaven walking through the earth and so you're concerned about their welfare.[33]

It is this leadership, culturally and socially relevant to the needs of the individuals whom it seeks to serve, that enables the Church to develop its function of promoting the personal development of its members. There is a close symbiotic relationship between leadership and congregation in which the one feeds and supports the other, thereby generating self-confidence, skills, talents and benefit for

the church as a unit. This was illustrated well by individual leaders within the Churches.

Rose, for example, is a leader for the youth choir of the NTCG. She used to be a teacher at the Saturday school that is part of the church. She feels that music has been a special gift for her and she describes here how she became involved:

> I've always been involved with the music sphere. I think music is my ministry and I've always been in and involved in anything that's happening within the musical department and so I suppose when people see that you can do something they say, well could you do such and such and I said yes. I feel that my ability, my talent lies there so I don't see why I should just be sitting on it, so I just go ahead and do it.[34]

Her response not only reflects the sense of community and belonging generated by the BLC but also the way in which the Church is able to nurture talent and ability in an effort at mutual support. This close sense of direction is not always as present in the Traditional British Church:

> With the old church I could have got involved if I wanted to but nobody pushed you into doing anything whereas at Shiloh they asked you to do things and to take part and you'd get called. The people were more out going, more friendly.[35]

Having been encouraged to enter into her position as a choir leader, Rose has a vital part to play in engendering the positive determination that is created during worship.

Carva has a preaching ministry to the youth of his church and others. His ministry began because he was often called upon to share his testimony and he eventually

went on to get his certificate and license. This process was, once again, reaffirmed by his church:

> I was a person who they felt should hold some credentials for ministry so they set me forth, as we call it in our church. The National Overseer said this man, we feel should actually have some certificate to actually confirm his ministry or his calling. Because I felt the Lord call me and He told me its mainly for young people that I've been called.[36]

Initially he was involved in cross cultural ministry "building bridges between Black and White Churches." This has since changed, as he explained:

> I'm less involved not because I feel more of a ministry to young Black Christians in my particular church...Because I'm actually in a Black majority Church I do feel allegiance to minister to Black youngsters.[37]

Having been encouraged by his church and urged on by a direct sense of calling and direction from God, Carva has gone on to encourage others by his life experience and communally shared faith. Both of these aspects contribute to his preaching ministry:

> It's affected by my life experience...It's affected by the whole local issues...the national issues and even world issues: politically, socially and theologically...I mean I think its important for me as a young minister to take all that on, so my preaching style, the content of my sermons would actually attempt to take that on.[38]

These mutually benefiting relationships which accurately illustrate the roles of leadership and personal development within the BLC are echoed throughout the lives of all the Churches researched and were heavily substantiated by interview and observation findings.

5. Encouragement

Naturally, in a close-knit community environment with believers who share a common cultural and spiritual identity, and who are led by those who are able to nurture and support that identity, a further characteristic that emerges from the BLC is that of personal encouragement and motivation. As with other features, this latter characteristic shares a symbiotic relationship in which individual members, in both conscious and implicit ways, provide encouragement for the leadership of the Church who, in turn, send back direct and indirect support and inspiration to the congregation. Collectively this then has an impact on the structures of the Church so that it produces an environment which is able to cater effectively, for both its membership and leadership.

Although there are obvious similarities between encouragement and incentive, their differences are highlighted by the way in which the former produces positive self-esteem and thinking patterns affecting the life of the individual whilst the latter provides motivation to direct that esteem towards affirmative and creative goals. Encouragement emerges very much from the community spirit of the Church environment in which believers are able to feel respected and valued in ways which are not always possible in other dimensions of their life:

> The most important part of a church when you go in for the first time is what the people are like, what the sermon is like...When I went in, those things came across as being very positive. The people were very nice; they treated me very well, they were always watching out for me.[39]

> I felt that there was almost a spiritual, a theological security that I could have actually put myself in, and I felt secure...It was the warmth that I felt emerged

> when I'd just become a Christian and people were saying, its good to see you in the church, we've been praying for you for such a long time...I really felt good about that.[40]

The above response indicates the extent to which liberational spirituality becomes, in a sense the contextual theology of the BLC as it manifests itself in the experience of the believers. Quite clearly linking with the sense of communal responsibility, the Church serves to give very tangible support to its members through the expression of personal interest in their lives and a practical concern for their welfare. It is for this reason that many interview respondents expressed a preference for a Black pastor who would have the skills and desire to empathise closely with the needs of his or her congregation:

> ...He or she would have an understanding about all the historical background, really coming from the Caribbean to England and the need to actually help or scripturally help people to say well the Lord will actually help you through whatever stresses, pressures, pains, anxieties, etc. that you're going through.[41]

Pastors responded accordingly, believing themselves to have a special role in the encouragement of their congregations, particularly their youths:

> I think I have the responsibility of helping the congregation to feel happy about themselves; to carry a positive identity and to have dignity...and how I do things is very important. I also have a responsibility to help them to share those things that they need to share in order to help them to lead a happier life. They may carry within them a lot of pent up emotions and I think that church is a place where they should be able to come to talk to their pastor and that the pastor will be able to direct them to someone who will be able to help them professionally and it would be all the better if that person is a Black person simply because the

> barriers have already been broken down and the person will feel more comfortable.[42]

In such an environment of mutual understanding, therefore, the process of encouragement is natural and takes place at each level of the Church's structures. It is most readily identified with the worship life in which believers are gathered in order to collectively acknowledge and receive power and direction from God - a process which also involves the 'laying down' of burdens and cares:

> Being able to pray with other people and identifying the struggle with other people, maybe within the church, getting together and talking about it is another plus. Within the church you feel that you are not alone when you do talk to other people and when someone else says well, I'll be praying for you, that is another plus and it could go on and on...[43]

Similarly the Church provides support and encouragement systems through the auxiliary organisations and mid-week meetings:

> ...its like weekends away, seminars and that then we address issues like that and then we get positive input. Like people who've gone through a bad experience, they share it so we can be enlightened so they know what to do if they ever come up against a situation like that...its helpful.[44]

Encouragement, in addition to having a distinct purpose can be seen as a natural product of each of the functions manifested through the BLC. As such it serves not only to build up confidence amongst individual Church members, but also to provide very tangible and effective means for the Church, as a body, to offer resistance against the oppression experienced in society.

6. Incentive/Hope

Incentive/hope is a product of encouragement. The Church provides a great deal of inspiration for living. It encourages, provides a sense of community and identity, gives direction and leadership which enables the nurturing of one's personal development. Together these qualities act as an intense motivational force in the lives of those who participate actively within its life.

The role of incentive and the provision of hope takes place on both a social and spiritual level. On the social side, members are surrounded by a network of believers, each with individual skills and talents and with a commitment to sharing these with the wider Church community. For the young, it means that role models and teachers are provided not only by the system of leadership but are, in fact, to be found everywhere within the Church body. They are available for support and advice, as one member explained:

> It's not just on a spiritual level, I think practically as well, because the church is made up of people...like social workers, and that's something I want to do, so I can get advice from them...There are people around me who I can go to...I don't need to go out of my way to find help.[45]

This practical support is very often provided by the Pastor himself:

> My pastor is a fantastic role model; for a pensioner, a man of sixty plus, he can still do the business, spiritually and socially. Also he has an open mind...the church does give guidance and direction.[46]

Inspiration can also come from the range of life experiences amassed in the Church and covering now first, second, third and even fourth generations of the African Caribbean community and subsequently reflecting their historical struggle:

> ...for me what inspires me is that there are people who are there who are eighty and they've lived through a society that didn't want them and also because they want me to succeed they say well look this is where I got to, you can get even further, and that's also an inspiration. I don't think I would have that if I was part of a White Church because it comes from a common historical experience, the fact that we're all Black people together and...in reality they want me to succeed.[47]

> Because you see Black people all the time it keeps you strong in the faith, in the Black faith. When I look at it, most prominent Black people over the centuries have always had a spiritual basis...I've noticed that a lot of Black people that are making it today throughout the country have a strong spiritual basis and it begs the question why?[48]

Inspiration through example is, therefore, a major part of the life of the Church. As oral history is passed down from older generations to younger, the young are presented with a vision and given a greater sense of motivation to progress further, both as individuals and as members of a community who have committed themselves to survival through resistance. Since it is largely through the support of faith working in the context of the Church that the older generation have been able to achieve their levels of liberation, it is possible to see social and spiritual realities blended together and working in unison to engender a sense of hope in new generations of Black believers.

The Church then, inspires and equips its members to determine and hold on to a purpose in life. That purpose is primarily to live within, and bare witness to, the power and glory of a loving Heavenly Father and to prepare one's life for being with that Father in a perfect other world. As has been argued, however, this other-

worldliness is not necessarily something which cripples the believer into accepting less than the best in this present world, but rather it gives extra incentive to be and attain the very best that one can in order to be worthy of that 'heavenly crown.' It raises standards, as one respondent was able to explain:

> Even though I believe in eternity, I'll tackle what's happening now...I will protest, I'll walk the streets of London with a banner...because I know that I've got to deal with things on earth as well... I believe in eternity but I also believe that we should deal with what we've been given on earth...So if someone's been wrongfully accused I'll protest. Why shouldn't I? What am I gonna do, wait till I get to heaven and then tell God? No! You deal with it now.[49]

The Church was able to spur on believers, to enable them to understand precisely what it was they were fighting for and to give them a context where this struggle could be communally waged:

> There was something different about Gibson Road, that I'd never seen before...there was a sense of belonging in all of that, something I could call mine... Everybody has their purpose in life...I know what my goal is, in the natural life and in the spiritual life...Sometimes things have been tough but I've always acknowledged that my place is in God.[50]

> ...I look upon it as a hope for the future but it doesn't mean that I look on this life as being totally worthless, it means that not everything I want will possibly happen but I can still do better and my religion is a focus, not just on things to come but for here now as well.[51]

A suitable point at which to conclude the discussion on this characteristic within the BLC is with a lengthy but revealing response from Pastor Thompson of the NTCG. Here, he clearly emphasizes the role of spiritual convictions in guiding, influencing

and encouraging social progress amongst his believers. What he refers to as "Christian faith" is essentially that liberational spirituality which has been the contextual response of Black Christians in Britain to the oppression they have faced and continue to face:

> The Christian faith is a powerful influence to tell you not to undervalue yourself; faith in God is saying that all things are possible and although I don't achieve today I will try and maybe tomorrow and then the next tomorrow instead of giving up. You know people do that; write off themselves, "oh poor me." No! Faith is the substance of things hoped for the evidence of things not seen; what you believe and you keep on tugging at it until you get there. So Christian faith is a powerful influence that keeps a people fighting on. We may be up against the odds but something is telling you, go on, you may succeed, God is for all. There's a powerful verse of scripture in Acts 10, Peter says "now I perceive that God is no respector of persons." So in this country which has a lot of class structure... you get into one of these by the system...but then faith in God is that God is no respector of persons and that's where equal opportunity lies.

This is a clear and powerful articulation of ACC's theological understanding of God and liberation. It reveals, above all, how intertwined the hermeneutics of liberation is with the holistic and liberational spiritual experience of believers within the BLC.

Contextual theology for the BLC in Britain has involved the continuation of a spirituality of liberation which is articulated through the experience of liberation, its human understanding of God. In practice this is manifested in the lifestyle of the Church members symbolised by the characteristics of community, identity, personal development, leadership, encouragement and incentive/hope.

By way of completing this exploration of liberation through contextuality, it is worth focusing on two key elements of the manifestation of a spirituality of liberation in the Church. These are (1) the language and liturgy of worship, and (2) the contribution of leadership to the spiritual identity of the BLC. The previous chapter has already highlighted the centrality of worship in the contextual response of ACC to liberation. It is useful here to complete that discussion with an exploration of its contemporary use in the Churches since it is worship which acts to consolidate and underpin each of the above characteristics as described.

Worship as Contextual Theology[52]

Worship can most appropriately be described as the life breath of the Church. As such it can be acknowledged as the foundation of liberation through spirituality in the Churches. It has played a central part in the organisation of each of the five denominations studied. This is reflected both in the amount of time committed to it in the overall life of the organisations and also by their internal facets: choirs, musicians, worship leaders, practices, singing groups etc. given over to its support. Worship gains its most explosive and dynamic expression during the Sunday or Saturday Divine service (although it is encouraged and manifested as part of every gathering and action that forms part of the life of the Church). What this weekly service represents is a coming together of expectations, frustrations, failures, successes and aspirations in an environment which is able to receive, accept and transform them into constructive living energies. This power source is then able to equip members to consolidate their vision whilst encouraging one another to attain it by the power of the Holy Spirit working in their lives.

Services in all five Churches shared an essential spirit of corporate identity and acknowledgement. This is despite the fact that the particular style of worship varied from a more formally structured and subdued service, in the case of the SDA Church and WHC, to a more energetic manifestation within the Pentecostal groups. Regardless of variations in style, all five Churches shared a basic similarity in the structuring of their worship. The most notable in this respect was the fact that the services were designed for maximum congregational participation, and that in many cases this participation was spontaneous.

Another aspect shared by all five Churches was an order and content of the worship service which often, on closer observation, revealed more of a consistent liturgical structure than could be appreciated at first glance. This structure has been described by Joel Edwards as "organised spontaneity."[53] It is represented within the research findings in the following way:

*1. **Sunday/Sabbath School** - a Bible study discussion for adults which precedes Divine service.*

*2. **Worship Time** - directly following the former sessions, lasting from fifteen to thirty minutes, and involving the singing of hymns and choruses, prayers and Bible readings.*

*3. **Testimonies** - an opportunity for individuals, sometimes visitors to share what God has been doing in their life. This can be the sharing of moments of victory or a request for support and prayer through a particular struggle. Testimonies are sometimes presented in song or by the recital of scripture; occasionally, and more frequently in the SDA Church, poems or readings are shared.*

*4. **Senior/Youth Choirs** - present one or more songs which have been previously prepared. Sometimes the choir accompanies the taking of an offering other times the offering precedes the singing item.*

*5. **Intercessory prayer/scripture reading** - usually in preparation for the sermon. Intercessory prayer will almost certainly be for the pastor or whoever will be preaching but it may also include members of that congregation or another who have requested particular support.*

*6. **Sermon** - This is by far the lengthiest part of the worship service lasting for anything from half an hour to one-and-a-half hours. The sermon is interjected by responses from the congregation and occasionally the preacher him/herself will interrupt with the request for a hymn or chorus.*

*7. **Altar Call** - There is rarely a service which does not include an opportunity for response from the members. Very often there is a call for re-dedication, commitment, prayer or blessing from those within the rank of established members and this is then followed by a call for unbelievers/non-members. The altar call will very often be accompanied by music and the singing of a hymn or chorus.*[54]

In addition to the worship and praise through music and song, what manifests itself conspicuously through the organisation of worship in the BLC is the central importance of the Word - both in terms of the relevance of scripture and of the spoken or sung testimony. In each case, this bears witness to the power and reality of God. It is no accident that in most of the Churches a strong emphasis is given to memorised rather than read text. In the case of the former, one is able, more readily to apply the Word directly to the circumstances encountered in one's social reality, thereby rendering it of more practical use.

Worship binds believers together in a communal act of thanksgiving and a reaffirmation of collective responsibility. As one respondent explained:

> When you've grown up with people as Christians and you've sung together and worshipped together, you've got a responsibility to look out for everyone's best interest; spiritually as well as materially. That's what God, I believe expects us to do.[55]

Worship subsequently acts as a two-pronged device. Firstly, it allows for believers' mutual recognition and support as they share together in song, testimony (witness), Bible reading and praying. Secondly, it provides a further basis for communal identity as it is recognised that the results of worship will be of benefit to all. This process was appropriately interpreted and summarised by a worship leader of the NTCG when she asserted to the congregation that "when the praises go up, the blessings come down." These "blessings" are manifested in the mutually beneficial characteristics, as explored, which the worship process is able to nurture. Moreover it was regarded, by the respondents, as something which was uniquely provided for them by these spiritual structures within the BLC:

> ...I think that Black people express their feelings stronger, right, and White people tend to put it down to madness and its not necessarily so and a Black man coming from that background would realise that he's expressing himself, he's not really mad.[56]

> Worshipping is important as long as you're worshipping right...That can't happen when you do something this way and White people might do it that way. That doesn't mean to say that neither of us are wrong or right...But I prefer the Black worship. I feel more comfortable and I've received much more than if I just went about in a more formal way.[57]

> I feel there is a sense of being positive; being part of a Black network...because I see Black people and I feel a part of that network. I feel the reassurance of just worshipping with the Black majority Church.[58]

The liberational implications of the worship life of the BLC are highlighted in further detail in the analysis of a youth night service of the NTCG (included in the appendices). The service concerned itself with three main objectives. The first was

the provision of an informal atmosphere for the holistic recognition and praise of God. The second was the encouragement of believers to commit themselves further and more thoroughly to this God who was so worthy of their praises. The third was affirmation of the benefits of serving God faithfully. This produces a victorious lifestyle which nourishes one's abilities to overcome the difficulties of this world and to live eternally and joyfully with God in the next.

It was clearly evidenced that throughout the service there was an emphasis placed on promoting a real sense of freedom within the spiritual realm and that this sense of freedom was to be given application within a social context. Worship, was to have a pragmatic value; it was to be used as a tool for interpreting and transforming the day-to-day realities of the believers. Hence no matter how 'spiritually' coated an analogy appeared to be, by necessity, it had to also have some bearing upon the social condition of the man or woman in the environment in which they lived. Similarly, however, there could be no sustained interest in the social world if it did not ultimately have spiritual meaning. The worship practice of the BLC, therefore, continues to draw from its African heritage of holistic and pragmatic worship. As such it continues to form the heart of the spiritual identity of ACC as manifested through the Black led denominations. Moreover it creates a contextual and liberational response to the experiences of ACC believers in Britain.

Leadership and Liberation

The quality and characteristic of leadership within the BLC is central to any discussion on the contextual nature of spirituality within the Church. So far exploration has been made of the ways in which a congregation is able to benefit

from a pastor who shares the cultural norms and values of his congregation. The interviews also reveal the significance for the pastor of having a congregation that is able to support and benefit them because of that same cultural identity. This was brought out, for example, by Pastor Williams of WHC:

> Leading a Black congregation you feel at home. You feel wanted, you do not feel as if you're leading people who look down on you. You're leading people who are of the same culture as you are, who seem to react and think the way you do, so I would classify that as an advantage...I know that the White population will look down on you but to me I'm proud to be Black I'm glad that I'm Black...it is something that I'm proud of.[59]

However, although headship brings personal benefit it is approached in the first place, for reasons which clearly went beyond personal gain, however gratifying that might be. In other words, leadership within the Church is more than a compensation for powerlessness in society.

Two of the five pastors were relatively young men (under forty), who had been formally educated to relatively high levels and possessed qualifications that would have enabled them to pursue fairly successful secular careers. The three older pastors - Pastor Corbett, Bishop Dunn and Pastor Thompson - had all received formal theological training and qualifications, having had many years of pastoral experience before taking up their current positions. In all cases the predominant motivator to leadership was the desire to contribute to the promotion of liberational spirituality in the lives of the believers. Such a spirituality was rooted in the understanding that, as Bishop Dunn phrased it, their charges were "going to heaven walking through the earth."[60]

Leaders are highly aware of the needs of their congregations. Most of them pointed to specific material problems that were evidenced regularly in the life of the Church. These included police harassment (particularly of the young men of the Church), undervaluing of children within the educational system, discrimination in the work place, etc. There were also problems surrounding lack of self-confidence and the impact of internalised oppression. Conceptually, the most effective way of responding to the latter was through the message delivered in the sermon.[61]

Sermons naturally vary from church to church . In some instances the pastor deals explicitly with issues of oppression, as for example, does Pastor Corbett:

> I speak a lot on social identity, on oppression, on discrimination and to show from scripture that God has no part in that...I speak very strongly on issues to do with racism etc., its all in the Bible, the Bible isn't aloof from all of those things.

Liberational Biblical hermeneutics makes a significant impact in responding to the social realities of the believers. Although the details of sermon delivery vary from church to church there are some themes which continually occur in sermons from all five denominations. They relate most specifically to the social needs of the congregation and have been recorded in the appendices.

The believers are encouraged to remember that God understands them and their practical circumstances and that, if they apply faith, He will see them through whatever difficulties they may experience. They are also encouraged not merely to overcome their difficulties, but to reach new levels of spiritual and social success simply by putting into action their trust in God and waiting to see how He will prove Himself to them. In this way, even where precise issues of oppression are not

voiced from the pulpit, the congregation is left with a clear understanding of the reality of God's intercession in their lives.

Liberational hermeneutics involves understanding God as the Divine Deliverer who will never leave them to face their problems alone. Jesus is the great Need Provider, so that they need not worry about how their problems will be solved. The privilege of belief, however, is not passively received. It is to be earned through the application of much faith and determination to see that God's Will prevails. Sermons constantly put the onus of deliverance on the believer: For example, "how are *you* fighting? - Victory *can* be yours."[62] The language of the sermon reflects spiritual battles against worldliness, sin and defeat. Frequently appearing are images of "battle", "victory", "weapons of faith". From this foundation the believer is encouraged to apply the message to his and her culturally-specific social realities.

Divine deliverance lies at the heart of the gospel message as expounded by the BLC pastor. At the centre of each sermon is the concept of deliverance from the bondage of sin into the freedom that lies over on the other side. Moreover while the ultimate goal of deliverance is a heavenly reward, the process of the "daily walk with Jesus" is ultimately what secures that reward. It is, therefore, the daily walk with God through the often harsh realities of the Black experience that provides the pivotal translation from spiritual talk to material reality since deliverance must also become a daily experience.

It is the task of the BLC pastor to groom his/her flock into an attitude of resilience in the face of adversity. The sermon must provide the guidance and inspiration enabling the believer to draw on spiritual strength and wisdom in order to maintain

deliverance against all "strongholds" of God's enemies. Indeed to this extent, the contextual response of the BLC to oppression is a message of liberational spiritual experience negotiated through daily acts of Divine Deliverance.

Contextual liberation is upheld and maintained through the efforts of the pastor's promotion of liberational spirituality in the denominations. Joel Edwards and Carol Tomlin are amongst many who have stressed the significance of the role of the Black pastor for his/her congregation.[63] The centrality of the Pastor's role in consolidating the contextual response of the Church, protects the Church from the potentially harmful conservatism of the international theology of the headquarters. It means, for example that a pastor is able to assert the independence of his/her congregation to pursue a spiritual existence that is most suited to their particular needs. This distinct identification is often achieved through the use of language and imagery, in particular Caribbean Creole. Tomlin has, in fact, argued that :

> The importance of the Black preacher and his influence...cannot be denied. The use of Creole among many Black preachers is significant and is an indicator of the subconscious level of 'Blackness' which pervades the Black Churches.[64]

This was substantiated in the fieldwork by both old and young leaders of the Churches.

A final observation to make on the role of leadership in creating and maintaining contextual theology within the Churches is that, in spite of the esteemed position of the pastor, the role of guiding and directing is distributed amongst a wider leadership structure consisting of deacons, ministers, mothers, elders, evangelist and others. This means that the responsibilities, as well as the benefits, of

leadership are not simply designated to the head of the Church but are opened up to the wider community of believers.

B. Liberation Theology as Holistic Theology

The second proponent of Liberation Theology (as explored at the conclusion of the second chapter) is that of wholeness. For a theology to be described as liberational it needs to respond to the range of experiences of oppressions that operate within its context. This should include those within its own internal structure as well as those without it. The extent to which the BLC in Britain has created a contextual response to its experiences of oppression through a spirituality of liberation has already been explored. The exploration of contextuality is found similarly within the theme of holistic liberation. Its examination begins with a look at the believer's understanding of oppression and continues with an analysis of their responses to oppression inside and outside of the Church context.

Responses Towards an Understanding of Oppression

In order to gain an understanding of how the BLC responded to oppression it was deemed necessary to examine the believers' definition of oppression and the meaning it held for them within the contexts of their spiritual and social lives. Consequently, the questions "*what is oppression and how can it be eliminated?*" and "*what is liberation and how can it be obtained?*" were posed. The responses fell largely into the following categories:

1. Misuse of power
2. Historical definitions
3. Spiritual reasons - sin

4. Lack of knowledge about other people/the effects of oppression on the oppressed.

Regardless of the response type, the ultimate explanation given was a spiritual one relating to the oppressor's lack of harmony with God - definitively, the sin of the offender:

> There are a number of reasons...There is the historical perspective in terms of colonialism, in terms of White superiority...There is a mentality, a structure and institution that infiltrates through...and then of course, as a Christian, you say well sin has a lot to do with this...There are sociological issues that are involved in evaluation or analyzing the reason why there is inequality.[65]

Within the above quotation there is demonstrated both spiritual and social explanations. Moreover, it is important to note how the idea of sin actually incorporates structural and historical understandings. Therefore sin takes on both an individual and a collective meaning. Ironically, the responses as to the solution to oppression appeared to be more divided. Some respondents pointed to an exclusive spiritual solution living in ever closer union with God:

> There is only one way that oppression can be eliminated and that is through Jesus Christ. Being a Christian you enjoy the best of both worlds...So when you see the Christian man being oppressed *and not being able to get up*, he hasn't totally given himself to the Lord. The problem is not with God, its with him...God takes pleasure in doing things for us but we've got to allow Him to do it.[66]

Others seemed to identify more structural solutions:

> Well as a Christian I'm supposed to say Jesus is the solution, and I do believe that in the long run. But there are solutions and that is by people joining together; dismantling the structures that maintain the practices and the oppression. As a Christian I believe

> that sin is caused by evil...There are many stages of liberation; it can be long term, short term...I'm finding every day within my experience...When I...began to realise that I'm Black and I'm a woman, that was liberation for me...But yet I'm still not free. So liberation is a process...the ability to discover your humanity, your personhood.[67]

> The mistake a lot of Black people make in this country is that they fail to pool their resources and do something for ourselves. The resources I am talking about is money and talent. It's time for us to get our money and skills together and start to open businesses and generate some money for ourselves.[68]

There are, of course, several distinctions to be made between the two sets of responses. The latter two point to liberation being sought and maintained through the collaboration of Black people, both in and outside of the Church context. They also embrace the social and economic mobilisation of Black people towards the goal of liberation for all. However all three responses are nonetheless connected by one important source: a liberationally spiritual context. For example, although the first response may initially appear other-worldly and socially irrelevant, closer analysis brings this assumption under question. The oppressed Christian man, in the respondent's opinion, is unable to "get up" from his oppression because he is not embracing the fullness of his contextual liberational spirituality. That spirituality, as has already been explored, is one which inextricably links the believer's social realities to spiritual solutions and his spiritual realities to interpretation in the social world. It is this holistic spiritual interpretation that stands as a foundation for the latter two responses, albeit that they represent a significant further step forward

towards social and political analysis. The similarities and differences between these two approaches will form the heart of the discussion in the next chapter.

In a similar vein, respondents' views on the relationship between individual and social sin also reflect this level of variation. The most popular response was not to see sin as a separate entity to social oppression but rather to see it as the root cause of all forms of oppression:

> One causes the other. I think its because we have sin that we have oppression in all its forms and therefore if you first deal with people's sin you can start to open their eyes to the kind of oppression they've been living under or causing...There's a causal relationship and the sin is the important point of it.[69]

> If one human being wants to oppress another then that is sin in itself. If someone wants to infringe on someone else's freedom that is sin in itself. But even if you are not oppressed by somebody, self can be a problem...You can let your own self down. Individuals can find their own selves a problem to themselves... Sin within an individual person can let a person down.[70]

The above responses clearly demonstrate a holistic understanding of sin which leads to the identification of a causal relationship between sin and oppression. Such an understanding lies at the foundation of other views as to the structural implications of this relationship:

> It's the same thing. I use sin as an umbrella word...I'm not using sin in the traditional Pentecostal meaning of the word; individual, but sin in structures; poverty, racism, sexism and sin manifest in different ways.[71]

> Sin isn't a tangible concept and neither is oppression. Oppression is a direct response of sin and one wouldn't exist without the other.[72]

It is significant to note that in the first of the above responses, the respondent identifies a divergence between her denomination's official theological interpretation of sin and her own.

Beyond these conceptual ideas about liberation, sin and oppression, interview and questionnaire responses clearly illustrated that believers identified Britain as an unequal society and themselves as suffering from oppression as a result of this. They cited discrimination in areas of employment, housing, education etc. and believed that the onus was always on them to prove themselves and work much harder than their White peer group. Some older people felt that they did not expect to be treated equally because this was not their country:

> I didn't expect them to treat me equally because reading my Bible has made me get wise. Britain is a very small country...I don't expect to be treated equally and I'm not too bitter as a Jamaican coming here. But I can't speak for the youngsters who are born here. Because where I'm concerned, I'm here but at any time I can pack my bags and go back to Jamaica, but what about these youngsters that are born here? There's nowhere else for them to go so I can't speak for them.[73]

Younger people, however were predictably less tolerant of their situation. Although the majority of them interviewed were employed - usually in professions such as housing, local council, teaching etc. or were higher education students or graduates - they nonetheless felt that they were forced into working much harder than their White peers in order to be accepted in particular fields. Most felt that although it made them angry or frustrated, they did not allow it to prevent them from succeeding:

> Well you don't dwell on it, you don't notice it... You get on. You ignore them...You don't pretend its not there; its obvious its there, but you overcome it. You know your own capabilities and you work according to those.[74]

> ...If you're trying to deny it me it doesn't mean to say that I can't get it. It doesn't mean to say I won't be able, or as Black people, won't be able to find out, be able to do something about the situation. You know I think the time is gone when we need to stand around and shout about we're getting this done to us...We've got to actually do something about it ourselves.[75]

As with perceptions on oppression and liberation, the responses expressed here represent different aspects of what essentially remains one viewpoint. That is, that spiritual understanding is considered a necessary tool through which to make sense of oppression within British society. It enables the believer to understand, interpret and respond to oppression. Although important differences exist, at the heart of all interpretations is an understanding of the impact of sin - social and individual - and the power of God to overcome it through the lives of individual believers and through them, the life of a community.

The Church and Social Policy

It is this basic understanding of the power of God to overcome evil and to benefit and care for those in His trust that underlines and inspires the social outreach of the BLC. It is this interpretation of God's intervention in the social circumstances of the oppressed which informs the holistic response of the Church. Thus far the study has illustrated how mutual care and self-help have been central characteristics in the life of the Church from its inception through to the present day. This desire to have responsibility for, and serve within, a local, national and even international

community has not been limited to the Church's own community of believers. It has evolved, from this foundation, to interact with and respond to the needs of the wider Black community. Within the Churches studied, this move is represented by a number of projects which are outlined below.

1. NTCG: *Saturday School, Senior Club, Nursery*

The school has been running for almost as long as the Lozells Church, having been originally started by the efforts of women members who wanted to respond to the disadvantages faced by their own and other Black children.[76] Headed by a management committee and staffed by twenty volunteers from both the church and the local Black community, the school has a register of seventy pupils with an attached waiting list. Pastor Thompson commented on the specific function of the school in encouraging young Black children to achieve beyond the low expectations placed on them through the institutions and ideologies of society:

> We try to inject something into society...These children come to school and if they were on the verge of giving up some of those teachers are able to encourage them saying, 'you can, you can.' Thank God some of them get through and are doing well.[77]

Part of this success comes through the holistic nature of the school's syllabus which covers the curriculum areas of English, Maths and Science. These are approached from a perspective that also takes into consideration the cultural needs of the children. Hence into these standardised areas there is an intermingling of self-esteem, identity and Black history. The school has been so successful that it has been able to diversify. It now runs summer and Easter playschemes and provides training for staff and parents.

The church also operates a senior citizens' club which organises a pick-up service for the local area. The club functions during the week and also on Sundays, taking the members between the church and their homes. The club not only provides them with a meal but also with much needed company, as Pastor Thompson explained:

> ...It lets them fellowship with other people to combat loneliness and frustration and so on. So the church is at work meeting their needs.[78]

Further community needs are met through the provision of a nursery or pre-school play group for children from two to five years old. The group, which was established as a day care centre, has been running since 1986 when it was created through the efforts of an early member of the church, Esme Lancaster.[79] Set up to meet the needs of local community parents, it currently holds a waiting list of eighty-seven pupils. It was the focus for the annual feature of the church's Building Programme for 1993.[80] As the promotional booklet for the project indicated, the Centre was created for the express purpose of responding to the social needs of those living in the local community:

> The project was born out of the needs that arose in the community...Parents are grateful for their children's development socially, physically, intellectually and emotionally. There are those who have gone back to college to gain experiences and are academically better off by finding a place in society whilst there are others who were able to find part time employment.[81]

As is demonstrated in the above, the service has implications for its users which go beyond simple nursery care. In so doing, the church intends to contribute towards the overall support and encouragement of the wider Black community:

> It is to help parents to go to college or go to school...to reach out socially to help our people in the community and not only the church people but Black people...It is important that charity begins at home they say. So if your own group is neglected then you will draw unto them first because who else will?[82]

2. WHC: *Day Care Centre for the Elderly*

Since 1983 the WHC has run a Day Care Centre for the elderly. The Centre was established in response to what was considered to be the poor conditions suffered by many Black elderly people in the local community. As Reverend Williams explained:

> I was having to visit a Black person and I was appalled at the conditions. Many times we're not aware of what Black people are facing in this community and as a Church we do not only have a responsibility for the soul but we have a responsibility for the entire man and we should try to help people not only spiritually but socially and physically. The Church has a part to play and we're trying our best to expand ourselves.[83]

Having identified this need the church has gone even further and has developed a home for the Black elderly in the community. Similar to the views of Pastor Thompson, Reverend Williams also believes that the Church is justified in being culturally specific in the services it provides:

> We are not prejudiced but we believe that the Black society seems to be left out and there are many Black people out there who are very much in need, so I do feel we have a special responsibility.[84]

3. SPF: *The United Evangelical Project*

The United Evangelical Project is an institution that will be discussed at length in the subsequent chapters. It is mentioned here since it was largely initiated and is

currently headed by Pastor Corbett of SPF. Emanating from his pastoral caring, the project is multi-functional in that it is concerned with theological training in addition to the provision of social utilities including a law centre, a prison ministry, mental health care and housing advice. Pastor Corbett clearly emphasised the church's outlook on the provision of culturally relevant community care:

> Wherever the Church is established they look at social issues because I was their first superintendent and that is the pattern that I've given them. Wherever there is a Shiloh Church you will find that they are looking at cultural things, they are looking at educational things...that's part of the reason that they are in the community, hence we're not spread out over the whole country.[85]

Apart from the activities of the United Evangelical Project then, the Church locates itself spiritually and geographically in order to respond to the social needs of disadvantaged Black communities.

4. SDA: *Harper Bell School*

The SDA Church was perhaps the least explicit in the manifestation of culturally specific community provision. This was largely due to the fact that it saw itself as a Black congregation of a multi-cultural world Church. Even so, its policies as a church within a region which is overwhelmingly African Caribbean undoubtedly reflect the needs of its Black membership - even in cases where this was not vocalised in these explicit terms. The greatest illustration of this is the Harper Bell Junior School, which has been functioning for four years and is pupiled by a clear majority of African Caribbean children.[86] Although Pastor Anderson was keen to point out that the school is established for any child and is an Adventist rather than

a 'Black' school, he also pointed out that it supports a syllabus which is relevant to the needs of its majority students. Most specifically, the children are supported by culturally relevant learning. Black s/heroes are highlighted while pupils have their self-esteem reinforced through the provision of positive role models, not least in that all of its teachers and its head are Black.

Although the Handsworth church has no specific community project, it does seek explicitly to make the church something of a community centre where, as Pastor Anderson related; "people can come in: Black, White, Asian; the community."[87]

5. FUCJCA: Education and Economics

Bishop Dunn was certainly one of the most vocal pastors when it came to expressing the need for the BLC to provide specific services for the congregation and wider Black community. Although the Handsworth branch did not have many social programmes in operation, it did organise a summer school which aims to train young musicians and there is a elderly housing project which is connected to branches in Bristol and Wolverhampton.

A particular concern of the church is the plight of the young and the issue of education:

> We are not going to get equality, no matter how hard we try, if we don't get up and try to help our people, especially the young people. We have to train them to get something in their heads. The Church has an active role to play in this. What I would like to see is for us to have our own school controlled by Black teachers because I don't agree with a lot of the things that are going on in school.[88]

The church is more advanced in policy when it comes to generating income which can, potentially at least, have some benefit for the local community. It has, for example, started a Caribbean bakery at a site in Sandwell which was opened with the intention of combating the hard-hitting effect of recession on the Black community. As Mr Mclean, the overseer of the project explained:

> We realised that jobs were getting more difficult for the Black people because of the racism that we experience and that is very strong when it comes to jobs.[89]

When the bakery started some five years ago it employed twenty-five people. Despite the fact that this number has subsequently dropped, the bakery has potential for a substantial amount of growth and plans are being made to exploit this. It is hoped these plans will lead not only to an increase in the finances raised from the project, but also to a greater number of people being employed by it. All of this is seen as an essential part of the work of the church:

> God has a financial programme on this earth and He has given us the wisdom and the know how so we've got to put that into practice and get his work going.[90]

The above projects demonstrate clearly that social ministry is considered a natural and essential part of liberational spiritual identity. The social dimensions of the work carried out by the Churches were substantiated by a general consensus amongst the interview respondents that their churches should become involved in the social, political and economic aspects of life in British society. All respondents felt that the Church had a vital role to play in providing these social services for the community. Most felt, also, that their churches should and could be doing more than they were

at present. The Church, they felt, should act as a moral indicator within society; it should speak out on all sorts of social issues since, as one respondent put it:

> There's no escaping the fact that Christianity means meeting the issues of everyday life head on and that is politics.[91]

As is evident in the responses of questions to oppression, however, the views within the churches concerning the nature of the role the Church should play in the social world was divided. On the one hand were those who felt it was about empowering individuals to succeed within society:

> Church is developing individuals who becoming spiritually aware are becoming aware of the needs of all the people so in that I see it as developing individuals who can go out into political roles. I don't know if the Church as a body should take a political stance, it should encourage people to go out into local government, into central government, become members of Parliament because we need spiritually aware people in positions of authority but I don't know if the Church itself should go into that position.[92]

On the other hand, there were those who saw the body of the Church itself as providing a catalyst for change in society:

> The Church should not just be isolated on its own...We need to go out and help other people, get involved with committees around, help to change education or whatever. It's a matter of getting involved in the community cause at the end of the day the Church is part of the community.[93]

Overall, however, it is fair to say that the contextual response of the BLC to oppression is to nurture and apply a liberational spirituality which benefits not only individual believers but which is directed also at the disadvantaged and struggling members of the wider Black community. As one respondent argued:

> I think Christ was against all forms of oppression; political oppression, verbal oppression, institutional oppression and so on and I take that very much to mean that as Christians, as Philippians 2 verse 5 is saying; fight against oppression. Therefore as a member of the Church I really feel that I have to fight oppression...Politics affects the Church and because it affects the Church, Christ is saying, be like me; fighting oppression, fighting the institutional racism. If there's a political way of doing it then I think we need to do it.[94]

The contextual expression of theology in the BLC is one which at least attempts to provide a holistic response in terms of tackling the issues of disadvantage which have an impact on its believers and the communities they represent.

Since this is the response of the Church to external issues of oppression, however, then the criteria for engaging in holistic theology have only partially been met. What remains to be seen is the way the Church responds to the issue of oppression reflected within its own structures. Internally, the placing of women provides a useful focus point through which to explore this element.

Women and Holistic Liberation

Since the Churches consist of an overwhelming majority of women, it is an essential exercise to explore the meaning of liberation from the context of gender. There are two fundamental observations to be made as a result of research findings concerning the position of women within the Churches. The first is that a predominantly male hierarchical structure and ethos within the Churches does serve to undermine or marginalise women members. The second is that in spite of this, women have not only been extremely significant contributors and sustainers of liberational spirituality within the Churches, but they have also been able to

challenge, resist and overcome their oppression within the wider society as a direct result of this spiritual foundation that they themselves have been responsible for creating.

The U.K Christian Handbook of 1990 puts the number of Black women leaders of BLCs at 39% which means that out of 2000 ministers, some 783 are women.[95] Although this figure compares favourably with most of the Traditional British Churches[96] it still means that women are substantially underrepresented in the headship positions of their churches. This disadvantage is often reinforced by the degree of moral and doctrinal control that the Churches are able to wield over the lives of their female members. The issue of sexism or discrimination within the Churches was reflected in the responses of some of the interviewees. One respondent, for example, argued that:

> Even through you're in a Black Church which is about self-determination, there are other issues which is about gender... There is a belief that it is men that should be leaders.[97]

This sense of dissatisfaction was shared, in particular, by many of the younger women respondents who saw their churches as largely insular in their views of the position and roles of women. They felt that the theological culture of the churches not only denied women a chance to participate on an equal footing with men but, even more insidiously, was often internalised by many of the women so that they were often the most outspoken supporters of sexist practice within Church structures. As a SDA respondent argued:

> Women aren't given the same credibility or sense of responsibility within the Church. You'll see women doing so called female roles...but they do not take the

> service...I think females within the Church are not given the opportunity to go through the system...and even some of the women will tell her to get down so the same way we internalise racism, we internalise sexism...a woman's place is not in the pulpit.

In her work on the BLC,[98] Elaine Foster, presents an image of the typical Black woman Church-goer. She does not wear make up or jewellery, wears a hat as a symbol of her subordination to men and has a general meek and quiet disposition. Whilst this image may be, in part, appropriate for a significant proportion of older members within the Churches, it is increasingly challenged by younger generations (evidenced by the above respondent). Hat wearing, jewellery and make-up are partially linked to broader denominational polity but more so it, in addition to the general status and role of women in the Churches, is being defined by individual leadership teams amongst the Churches and, most importantly, by individual women. These women, who in the larger, usually stricter, denominations were once relegated to the rebel margin of their congregations, are slowly becoming accepted as part of the mainstream. This change also coincides with the increase of younger men and women in ministry teams.

It is clear that the undermining of women within the Churches does present a limitation to the extent to which the BLC can be said to be adopting an holistically liberational theology which takes into account the marginalised and oppressed communities that exist within their own structures. The nature of women's liberation needs to be examined carefully within the Church context. Firstly there appeared to be significant differentiation within research findings regarding the attitudes of individual denominations, and even of specific churches, towards the roles of

women. Secondly, the status and function of women within the Churches has historically been more often defined by their roles as *leaders within* churches rather than necessarily as *heads of* churches.

To illustrate the first case it appears that those churches which maintained a greater degree of autonomy from their American headquarters are able to offer a greater liberational context for their women members. One respondent, for example, who had transferred her membership from one BLC to another felt that it was in coming to SPF that she was able to begin to replace the sexist ideas that she had learned in her previous church experience. Another SPF member made the following comment on her experience as a Black woman in the Church:

> I'm given as many opportunities as anyone else there to develop... I can excel as much as I want to and as much as God wants me to ... and I don't think that any woman could say that there are any restrictions... A lot of churches have more women than men so they have to use them.

The above response demonstrates the second point. In seeking to determine the meaning of holistic liberational identity for the Black women in the BLC, it is necessary to consider her own specific understanding of the concept of power. Control, for many Black women, is not necessarily gauged by the numbers of ordained women leaders of churches, but is most often discerned by the degree of influence maintained in the act of community building and the development, maintenance and influence of liberational spirituality within the Churches and communities. Foster, has demonstrated how many women have succeeded in resisting the limitations held against them by setting alternative priorities which they

feel will be of benefit to the community overall. The issue of Church headship provides one very clear example of this:

> It appears that the women are more concerned about the survival of the community than about who leads or manages the organisation. So anything which could rupture the stability, or lead to dissent in the community must be avoided for the sake of its survival[99]

For women within the Churches, liberation operates on both explicit and implicit levels. At its most explicit levels it seeks to articulate and challenge the practices and doctrines which restrict the roles and identities of women within the Churches and society. As has been documented in previous studies, women pastors have been able to begin the process of re-exploring methods of doing ministry and have begun also to work out the realities of as yet undocumented womanist theologies.[100] At its implicit levels liberation works in relation to those restrictions imposed by patriarchal doctrine adopted from dominant theologies, to nurture and engage in a spirituality which empowers both women and men to counteract the wider discriminatory forces of society. Both manifestations involve a commitment to liberation of self through liberation of the wider community both in the Church and outside of it and in social as well as spiritual dimensions.[101]

The concerns of Black women are increasingly being acknowledged within the mainstream of Church life. This has meant that both young and older male ministers are becoming willing - and even eager - to acknowledge the contribution that women have made to the maintenance and development of the Church and communities and the particular struggles they have faced in both of these contexts.

In recent years, especially, there has been an effort to recognise and to encourage women with respect to the struggles and victories that have been uniquely theirs and to do this within the programme of the Church. The SDA Church, for example, has an informal annual celebration of Black women which seeks to educate members at the same time as to celebrate the Black woman. As Pastor Anderson explained:

> We are interested in helping women to recognise that they are worth while beings. They are beings that have a lot to contribute to our society, our community...they have rights and they should claim their rights.....We say not only are you women but you are Black women; you have had a particular kind of experience that males haven't had and White females haven't had and its a unique experience that you need to share with us because we need to have it in order to be well rounded, fully equipped as it were in relating to each other.[102]

With a similar aim in mind, the WHC held a two day celebration of Black women as part of the 1992 Birmingham Women's Festival which consisted of a seminar and performances. The seminar was led by four Black women speakers representing the Care of the Elderly organisation, the Education Department, and Birmingham and Sandwell Social Services. The participating women were encouraged to share their experiences and to acknowledge and celebrate their sacrifices. One of the speakers, Counsellor Spence, encouraged Black women to "Claim the inheritance," by claiming their rights, both spiritual and social: in effect to engage in liberational spirituality:

> I don't have to ask how you feel about God because I know if you didn't put Him before you you wouldn't be here today because the things that we have done and the things that we are surviving under, who could it be

> apart from the Lord? Nobody but Him...We must believe in ourselves...this is the time that the Black community must love one another, respect one another...pool our efforts and energy.[103]

The evening's celebration was attended by a full hall of visitors, members and guests. The event was clearly intended as an affirmation of the struggles of Black women and a further encouragement for them not only to continue, but even more significantly, for them to pass on their heritage to younger generations of male and female Christians and community members. As such it provides a useful illustration of one way in which the engagement of the Churches with holistic elements of liberation is being explored and developed.

This chapter has explored the claims which the BLC can make to engaging in a liberational theology on the basis of forming a contextual and holistic response to the oppressive conditions with which its members and the communities they represent are confronted. Its overwhelming contextual response is a liberational spirituality which utilises several core communal characteristics in order to interpret and confront the oppressive realities of the believers. The essential nature of the contextual response of the BLC can also be claimed as holistic in that it seeks to interact with every area of social reality with which the believers themselves are engaged. Internally, however, the somewhat paradoxical connection that the Churches maintain with dominant fundamentalist theologies often means that, particularly in the treatment of women, the explicit manifestations of theology and Church dogma serve as limitations to its holistic development. The driving force of liberational spirituality which lies at the very heart of Black theology in the Churches

has ensured, nonetheless, that they are able to counteract the pernicious influence of dominant theology. It is, therefore, through their guardianship of the contextual response - something which has previously been demonstrated as an historically consolidated trait of the Church - that they have been able to maintain a holistic understanding and response to the concerns of the oppressed in the Churches and in the wider communities. By way of these two elements alone therefore, the BLC can be said to be engaging in a liberational theology in Britain. As the remaining chapters explore the other criteria for liberation, the precise nature of and limitations to this contextual theology of liberation will even more strongly emerge.

Notes and References

[1] Interview respondent, FUCJCA.

[2] The respondents used within this chapter have been drawn from the British and not the Jamaican responses.

[3] Sidney A. Dunn as quoted by Macrobert in Badham, op. cit. pg. 128.

[4] Calley, op. cit, pg. 2.

[5] All of these circumstances involved adherents (unofficial members) of the church who were usually related in some way to official members.

[6] Interview respondent, SDA.

[7] Interview respondent, NTCG.

[8] Many of these programmes, most particular the singing concerts have begun to involve the coming together of members from a variety of BLC, to form, for example, community gospel choirs. A further development has meant that the young people are now beginning to come together for other concerns also, for example youth training etc. and this is being reflected in the programme building organisations such as the African Caribbean Evangelical Alliance. See chapter six for further details.

[9] Pastor Thompson, op. cit.

[10] Questionnaire respondents on cultural identity.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Questionnaire respondents on reasons for belonging to a Black Church.

[14] Interview respondent, NTCG.

[15] Interview respondent, SDA.

[16] Taken from a recorded interview with Pastor Williams, WHC, 1992.

[17] Taken from a recorded interview with Pastor Corbett, SPF, 1992.

[18] Pastor Anderson, SDA, 1992.

[19] Interview respondent, WHC.

[20] Interview respondent, NTCG.

[21] Interview respondent, SPF.

[22] Interview respondent, SDA.

[23] Interview respondent, FUCJCA.

[24] Interview respondent, SPF.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Interview respondent, WHC.

[27] Interview respondent, SDA.

[28] Interview respondent, NTCG.

[29] Interview respondent, SPF.

[30] Pastor Thompson, op. cit.

[31] Pastor Gray, from a recorded interview, 1992.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Bishop Dunn, op. cit.

[34] From a recorded interview.

[35] Interview respondent SPF.

[36] From a recorded interview.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Interview respondent, SPF.

[40] Interview respondent, NTCG.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Pastor Anderson, op. cit.

[43] Interview respondent, NTCG.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Interview respondent, WHC.

[46] Interview respondent, SPF.

[47] Interview respondent, WHC.

[48] Interview respondent, SDA.

[49] Interview respondent, SPF.

[50] Interview respondent, FUCJCA.

[51] Interview respondent, SDA.

[52] An important supplement to this section is provided in appendix 4.

[53] Edwards, op. cit, (1992) pg. 68.

[54] The SDA also include a children's time in their Divine services where the very young people of the Church go up to the altar and have an illustrated story told to them.

[55] Interview respondent, NTCG.

[56] Interview respondent, SDA.

[57] Interview respondent, NTCG.

[58] Ibid.

[59] From a recorded interview.

[60] Bishop Dunn, op. cit.

[61] See appendix 3.

[62] Ibid.

[63] See, Edwards, op. cit, (1992) pg. 46 and Tomlin, op. cit. (1988).

[64] Tomlin, ibid, pg. 161.

[65] Interview respondent, NTCG.

[66] Interview respondent, FUCJCA.

[67] Interview respondent, SPF.

[68] Interview respondent, SDA.

[69] Interview respondent, WHC.

[70] Interview respondent, FUCJCA.

[71] Interview respondent, SPF.

[72] Interview respondent, SDA.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Interview respondent, NTCG.

[75] Interview respondent, FUCJCA.

[76] One of the women involved in the school's beginning was Elaine Foster who subsequently became headmistress for a local secondary school in Handsworth.

[77] Pastor Thompson, op. cit.

[78] Ibid.

[79] See Alexander in Jarret-Macauley, op. cit.

[80] The Building Programme is described as an annual feature of NTCG which aims to bring to members' attention to a particular need that exists within the life of the church in order to gain financial assistance for development. It then becomes featured in various social and religious activities during the year. The intention with the Day Care Centre is to improve the premises so as to be able to increase the places available and reduce the waiting list. Information obtained from **Presentation of a Rally, Building for the Future**, a programme information booklet supplied by NTCG.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Pastor Thompson, op. cit.

[83] Rev. Williams, op. cit.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Pastor Corbett, op. cit.

[86] The school is actually located in Cape Hill.

[87] Pastor Anderson, op. cit.

[88] Bishop Dunn, op. cit.

[89] From a recorded interview.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Interview respondent, SPF.

[92] Interview respondent, NTCG.

[93] Ibid.

[94] Ibid.

[95] Peter Brierley and Val Hiscock, **The U.K Christian Handbook**, (Christian Research Association, 1992-3) the statistic has been compiled in **LandMARC**, (Autumn, 1991).

[96] The Handbook of the same year places the figures for Baptists, Methodists and Anglican Churches at 3%, 9% and 5% respectively.

[97] Interview respondent, SPF.

[98] Foster, op. cit, (1990) particular the chapter entitled *Defining the Church Sister.*

[99] Ibid, pg. 45.

[100] See Alexander, op. cit.

[101] Ibid.

[102] Pastor Anderson, op. cit.

[103] Taken from a transcript of the WHC seminar.

CHAPTER FIVE: PASSIVE AND ACTIVE RADICALISM IN THE BLC

> ***I love Black Churches, I'm proud of Black Churches because its about self determination and Black Led Churches are the only organisation from slavery downwards, that is about Black organisation; Black people in power, Black people leading, Black people participating...To me its about self determination; its about Black people on our own, serving God and through the castles of our own skin.***[1]
>
> ***What I'm saying is that if people are going to use the term Black Led Church, then its got to have some meaning behind it... on a social level as well as on a spiritual level.***[2]

Thus far the research materials have presented a picture of two spheres of liberational response; internal and external, made by the BLC to its conditions in British society. The internal is characterised by certain features nurtured by the structures of the Church which combine to provide a pragmatic and holistic spiritual identity for its members. The external refers to the way in which the Church has, through this spiritual identity, attempted to identify and respond to the social needs of its congregations and their communities through a range of self-help services. Both the internal and external activities of the Church can be described as contextual, firstly in that they have emerged as a syncretised expression of African and European theologies and secondly in that they represent a unique response to the wider social and political conditions the Church has been made to relate to, both in its contemporary life and throughout its historical development.

This chapter will continue to explore the reality and nature of liberation within the Churches by assessing the manifested identity against the criteria summarised in chapter two. The criteria with which this chapter will concern itself follow on

from those cited as A and B in the previous chapter. They are (C) *Liberation Theology must engage in social analysis,* and (D) *Liberation theologians must engage in critical reflection upon their liberational praxis.*

The analysis of the extent to which the BLC can be said to have met the above criteria will, essentially, direct the study to the heart of the thesis and in so doing will play a significant role in defining the precise contextual identity of liberation within the Churches.

C. Social Analysis as Facilitator of Liberation Theology

It has been suggested that Liberation Theology needs to engage with tools of social analysis where they serve to explain and give meaning to causes and mechanisms of oppressive practice and ideology. The paradigm of Latin American theology in particular has illustrated how the application of methods of social science can aid in an effective analysis of the nature of oppressive society - its present realities as well as its historical development. From this basis, theologians such as Boff and Gutierrez have been able to nurture a liberative theological praxis through which their contextual concerns of oppression are able to be confronted.

The issue of theology's engagement with social analysis necessitates an understanding of the way in which theology works at popular, pastoral and professional levels. Thus far the study has concentrated on the first two of these theological levels; the present discussion will continue in this vein. What is essentially under discussion here, therefore, is the way in which, at popular and pastoral levels, the BLC has engaged in an analysis of the social conditions with which its members have been confronted. Popular and pastoral levels of the BLC have already been identified as engaging in holistic and contextual

theology. It is from this foundation that the extent of its interaction with social analysis must also come to be understood.

Liberational Spirituality as Passive Radicalism

The Church's engagement with social analysis is inextricably intertwined with its manifestation of liberative spirituality. This spirituality which has been understood as holistic and fundamentally connected to the social experiences and realities of ACC believers is the overriding medium through which, at pastoral and popular levels, the BLC interprets and analyses the social context of those believers. Liberative spirituality is, therefore, the key epistemological tool at these levels. The contextual development of the Church means that it has most often been, however, essentially an implicit tool enabling believers to identify, challenge and overcome the various levels of their ideological and material oppression without necessarily seeking out its socio-historical source and without making an explicit theological alignment with that liberative process. To the extent that this manifestation of social analysis within the BLC would seem to represent yet another paradox, it has been identified in this study as *passive radicalism.* Social analysis through passive radicalism describes how the BLC has sought to undermine the ideologies and practices of race, class and gender oppression within the everyday, holistic experience of its spirituality. It is useful to begin an exploration of the radical component within the principle before going on to examine its limitations.

The *radical* component of the BLC's engagement with social analysis relates to the way that it has created a contextual understanding of the experiences of racism and disadvantage. Its own unique existence as an institution during the past forty-five years of Black British history is evidence of its commitment to

interpreting and responding to the social realities with which its members are surrounded. Indeed its attraction as a subject of study for social scientists and religionists over the years has been precisely because it exists not purely as a series of religious organisations but, more significantly, of Black organisations. In so doing, it represents a form of Black community mobilisation. The BLC's engagement with social analysis at popular and pastoral levels, therefore, cannot be understood as a distanced theoretical exercise but must be viewed contextually, as an integrated process within the holistic Church experience.

Interpreting Social Analysis in the BLC

This fundamental reality has been variously interpreted by researchers of the BLC over the years. For example, Clifford Hill, writing in the early 1960s regarded the Churches as harmful sects which stood ultimately "against the long term interests of the immigrants."[3] Malcolm Calley, writing in 1965 saw the Church in terms of a pernicious fringe establishment and its adherents as having been "hardened" into a pattern of "religious apartheid" activity that made it impossible for integration to take place.[4] Ironically, whilst Calley's description of the Church implicitly indicates his awareness of its existence as a religious, social and even political reality, he is nonetheless unable to credit this reality with legitimacy since for him it is a dysfunctional response to a society where such political acts are not needed:

> Perhaps in Jamaica the saints; seeking religious consolations for hopeless poverty and social disorganisation is inevitable; their position is indeed hopeless. But in England the position of the West Indian minority is far from hopeless... *Britain does not have an acute race relations problem...The migrant is not caught in a closed system.* He can overcome the undoubted disadvantages of having a dark skin, and often does...[5]

Hence in spite of the political and ideological overtones of the term "religious apartheid" and of his implied accusation of the Church as a separatist movement, Calley sees the existence of the BLC in Britain essentially as an act of escapism and withdrawal, devoid of any legitimate social analysis or response:

> The thoroughgoing obsessive, ritual withdrawal of the saint from the world *appears to be out of all proportion to the actual difficulty of the situation he is withdrawing from.* I think this can only be understood historically...There is in the West Indies a long tradition of seeking magico-religious rather than practical solutions to problems. This is particularly true of Jamaica, whence nearly all of the sect members have come. [6]

In addition to a superficial understanding of Jamaica's historical religious traditions, what Calley illustrates here are the problems which can be encountered when a researcher attempts to understand the position of the Church vis-à-vis its place in society from the outside. That is to say Calley approaches his study as a middle class, White, male researcher and interprets social reality on behalf of his research subjects, thus relegating the entirety of their religious behaviour to the level of withdrawal. He is unable or unwilling to take seriously the experiences of the migrants in a racist and unwelcoming British society. Nor is he able, therefore, to consider the development of their faith from an historical perspective alongside the impositions of a dominant missionary led Christianity which also went hand in hand with the forces of slavery, colonialism and racial oppression. Essentially, therefore, despite being able to recognise that the identity of the BLC holds political implications, researchers such as Calley and Hill have been unable to understand the *radicalism* inherent within this identity. This is necessarily the case since their

research emerges not from the position of those needing to engage in liberation but from those representing those structures which are being resisted.

Subsequent, White researchers have been able to avoid some of the more obvious errors of Calley and Hill and have consequently come closer to exploring the implicit radicalism in the existence of the BLC in Britain. Both Roswith Gerloff[7] and Iain Macrobert,[8] for example, have approached their studies by taking seriously the socio-religious and historical contexts of the BLC. Gerloff, for example, when describing the collective identity of the BLC, writes:

> They are part and parcel of Black culture with its wholesome approach to human life. They are the guardian of a radical or prophetic strand of Christianity, and the precise political response to the situation of Blacks in a White racist society.[9]

Her study, which takes a very detailed look at the African sources and Caribbean development of Sabbatarianism and Oneness Pentecostalism, is at pains to illustrate the political potential inherent in holistic Black spirituality. She identifies the communal qualities of the Church as being a major source of empowerment for oppressed Black adherents and is able also to recognise the liberative functions in the central principles of Black theological expression.[10] In this respect, Gerloff's study can be aligned with the work of liberation theologians in America, South Africa and the Caribbean who, as the second chapter has explored, have understood the essential culture of Black faith in the Churches to be one of resistance and liberation.

Iain Macrobert picks up on the theme of holistic liberation in his study and focuses particularly on the centrality of *experience* within the Black liberational tradition. From the very beginning of his study he is keen to point out the difficulties of himself as a White researcher - and of Western theology in general

- gaining academic access to something which he has identified as being "primarily experiential in cognitive terms."[11] This foundational assumption of the emotional as opposed to rational nature of Black Pentecostal spirituality will necessitate further exploration.

Like Gerloff and unlike Calley and Hill, Macrobert traces the contextual development of the Pentecostal Church. He understands it as essentially a syncretised faith which has needed, throughout its history, to respond to both the physical as well as ideological realities of racism with which it has continually been confronted. To the extent that the BLCs have created for themselves internal spiritual defences against the effects of both physical and ideological racism, Macrobert argues that they have attempted to undermine the prevailing hegemony of oppression. In so doing, he suggests, BLCs have thereby engaged in a 'psychological liberation' which has its heart in a Black leitmotif grounded in experiential reality and manifested through an implicit theology.[12]

Ironically, although these later studies of the BLC in Britain adopt a more sympathetic and sensitive approach towards the contextual development of the Church, they (in particular Macrobert) appear to share in common an understanding which lays strong emphasis on the experiential and anti-intellectual nature of Black radicalism within the manifested theology. This theme is echoed in the work of John Wilkenson[13] and in the more anthropological accounts of Roy Kerridge.[14] It is an emphasis that serves to limit the way these studies are able to identify the level of social analysis carried out by the Church itself since it does not tell, as the theologian Cecil Cone has argued, "the whole story."[15]

Whilst this study has sought to argue, like these latter studies, that liberation within the BLC is inextricably tied to a resistant spirituality which takes its implicit impetus from an African world view, it distinguishes itself from them in its attempt to define this spirituality as not only liberational but, most significantly, holistically so. That is to say that whilst the experience of liberation certainly is mediated through the "emotions, body and mind...all committed to worship and celebration of life",[16] the holistic experience of liberation within the Churches cannot be understood without reference to the continual cycle of social analysis carried out at pastoral and popular levels. The apparent dichotomy that exists, therefore, in Macrobert's account between cognitive and experienced liberation in the BLC is a false one. Moreover to insist on the essentially emotional and anti-intellectual nature of the BLC is to veer dangerously towards ideologies of cultural racism such as that expressed by missionary Christianity in the nineteenth century Caribbean.

It may in fact be the case that, as Elaine Foster suggests, the most useful representation of social analysis in the BLC can be found in "whe dem seh (that is what is said by the people themselves.)"[17] Certainly a most welcome addition to the writing on the BLC, both in its historical development and contemporary status, has been those African Caribbean writers who have emerged, in particular, from within the ranks of popular and pastoral theological tradition in Britain. These contributions will form part of the focus of the second set of criteria for consideration in this chapter. Their principle value in the present discussion is to highlight the degree to which the social analysis emerging from the BLC is represented not only through the experiential based leitmotif of liberational spirituality but also through theoretical analysis and reflection. This is

particularly well represented in the works of Selwyn Arnold, Elaine Foster and Ira Brooks, as will be examined later.[18]

The radical element in *passive radicalism* seeks to acknowledge the ways in which the core identity of the BLC engages in an implicit form of social analysis through both experiential and cognitive means. Yet when seeking evidence for such a claim it is essential to approach the Church from its own contextual placing: it is particularly important to allow the Church, as it were, to speak for itself. A useful model for such an approach is provided by Patricia Hill Collins in her projection of an Afrocentric feminist epistemology.[19] Collins, as stated in the introduction to this study, begins by critiquing what she identifies as the "masculinist knowledge validation process", the ultimate aim of which is to present a "white male standpoint" regardless of the various manifestations such a process may take.[20] She goes on to assert the inappropriateness of such hegemonic epistemologies when applied to the experiences of Black women. At the heart of the concept of radicalism as it is used in the term *passive radicalism,* then, is an embracing of an alternative epistemology for the BLC - one that is able to take seriously the reality of the social analysis implicit in an holistic liberational spirituality.

Collins' counter-hegemonic epistemology involves four key components. These are (1) Concrete experience as a criterion of meaning (2) The use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims (3) The ethic of caring, and (4)The ethic of personal accountability.[21] Each of these will prove useful in identifying the nature of social analysis in the Churches.

Firstly according to Collins' analysis, it is vital for the epistemology of BLC members to be clearly identified with the experience of day-to-day realities. This

is not the same thing as saying that members of the Churches are only able to respond to their social realities through the medium of their emotions; to the contrary, it highlights the fact that their means of cognitively analysing their social conditions must be inextricably aligned with their material experience of those realities. The purpose of social analysis, therefore, should not be to create abstract social scientific formulas about the meaning of oppression and the means of liberation, it should rather be to clarify - to shed light upon - an experienced reality so as better to respond to that reality in pragmatic terms. This, in Collins' analysis, is symbolic of the separation between decontextualised *knowledge* systems and those Africentric epistemologies which rely upon contextual and holistic *wisdom.* For purposes of clarity her original term 'Black women' has been substituted by BLC members:

> This distinction between knowledge and wisdom, and the use of experience as the cutting edge dividing them, has been key to *BLC members'* survival. In the context of race, gender, and class oppression, the distinction is essential. Knowledge without wisdom is adequate for the powerful, but wisdom is essential to the survival of the subordinate.[22]

It is, therefore, "concrete experience" which serves as a catalyst to social analysis and not remote theories of social analysis which are made to somehow fit in to the mould of the BLC.

Secondly, Collins' analysis suggests that the existence and the centrality of community relations within the BLC experience contributes towards another key element of its alternative epistemology. The significance of dialogue, facilitated by the supporting communal environment, allows for the promotion of holism rather than diametricism. Hence the Church is able to exist with what appear to

be, through the medium of dominant epistemologies, stark contradictions and dichotomies. Moreover, since communal action and response lies at the heart of the BLC experience, its engagement with social analysis is necessarily dependent on that community for its sense of legitimisation.

Thirdly, the epistemological approach of the BLC is one which, as has already been acknowledged in most studies of the BLC, takes seriously the imperative of emotion. The ethic of caring means that the obligation which the Church places on itself to embrace the essential humanity of its members and the communities they represent is part and parcel of its holistic analysis. Moreover, the expressing of emotion is a rational and experiential part of its epistemology since it indicates a commitment to what Collins' refers to as "the validity of an argument."[23]

Finally the ethic of personal accountability means that the social analysis of the BLC will not take place in a spiritual vacuum. Those who engage in social analysis on behalf of the Church must first give account of their own spiritual standing. In the language of the Church, this involves clarifying "where they stand in the Lord." However since a declaration of 'true' Christian faith is also, for the believers, an announcement of allegiance with the spiritual and material forces of right, then the ethic of accountability also becomes an affirmation of allegiance with the oppressed. In this way the social analysis of the BLC stands as an independent and counter-hegemonic epistemology. As Collins highlights:

> ...Emotion, ethics, and reason are used as interconnected, essential components in assessing knowledge claims...Values lie at the heart of the knowledge validation process such that the inquiry always has an ethical aim.[24]

It is possible to argue, therefore, that the BLC engages with social analysis, not as a disinterested or objective science but as an essential and concrete part of its experienced reality. Moreover it is in this way, through its engagement with an alternative epistemological framework, that members of the BLC are able to become what the theologians Boff and Boff have described as "social subjects of the historical process."[25] This means that they are able to make sense of their position in the social world in the light of their own efforts at self liberation rather than by the strategies of those who oppress them.

Social Analysis as Passive Radicalism

It is clear then that the nature of social analysis within the BLC needs to be considered from the vantage point of an alternative epistemology to that usually engaged in by positivistic social science. This study has therefore employed the model provided by Collins as an appropriate contextual and phenomenological alternative. Through this model it is possible to see how the BLC, in its existence as a Black institution which nurtures the characteristics which have been identified in previous chapters, stands itself as a testament to its own engagement with social analysis. This analysis, moreover, is both experiential and cognitive.

In its contextual reality and as an ongoing commitment to its active analysis of the social world, the Church provides an essential vehicle for the empowerment of its adherents. It does not simply create an imitation power base in which individuals can, as it were, play at liberation. Rather it creates an *alternative* power house in which believers are able to put into practice a counter-hegemonic epistemology which constantly enables them to challenge and

reaffirm their own existence in the social world. This is essentially what makes passive radicalism liberational.

Before moving on to the process of identifying the passive counterpart to the radicalism manifested through the social analysis of the Church, it is useful to provide some concrete examples of the working out of this radicalism. The overwhelming evidence from the research carried out for this study illustrated the many ways in which believers were motivated to resist the obstacles placed against them by their race, class or gender because of their spiritual convictions nurtured within the context of the BLC. As one respondent shared: "I try to break down barriers that exist, I never leave them. I always try to go through them and break them down."[26] At the foundation of each church, therefore, is firstly an acknowledgement of the oppression that faces believers and secondly an implicit commitment to equip believers with the holistic spiritual power to overcome it:

> In work I realise that in this society there's only so far that you can get... Whatever you're doing in life, if its what God wants then nobody can stop it. They can hinder it but they can't stop it. My pastor always says, what's for you can't not be for you. If its for you then its for you. It may take some time to get there but if its for you then nobody can stop you.[27]

Since the impetus for social analysis within the Churches is a liberational spirituality grounded in concrete social experience, its manifestation operates on two distinct levels. The first involves asserting believers' claim to full access into the material benefits of life in British society:

> I believe in a Christian having the best house, the best car... I don't believe that a Christian should walk around being destitute because God's people should have the best because all things belong to

> God and God would not have his children suffering.[28]

The above illustrates a theological imperative for the material struggle for equality which emerges from the implicit analysis in which the Church engages. Secondly, however, the counter-hegemonic nature of the Church's epistemology means that it promotes an alternative sense of values and priorities which allow its members to define their own legitimacy not in material but in spiritual terms:

> I'm happy with who I am and I'm not out earning mega bucks and I can't buy the designer clothes that I like but I'm happy. So I'm not gonna place my happiness and who I am on what I can get materially... I'm a young Black woman who's got a strong faith in Jesus and believes that the situation that I'm in at the moment is materially not so hot but it will change and I've got work to do for the kingdom and it might mean that my material wealth increases, it might mean that it stays the same but you know that doesn't really matter. I can't base who I am on what I have.[29]

> What is power? I believe if you're happy, well balanced and you believe in yourself you can gain power. You can get a good job and if you have a good stable family and that is power for you. Not every individual wants to run the country, but if you can still make yourself happy then that is a certain amount of power in itself.[30]

The influence of an African epistemology becomes apparent in the above quotation through the maintenance of the theme of continuity. Believers retain an understanding of themselves as whole beings, having implicit value and power as children of God which cannot be eradicated by external conditions. Simultaneously the theme of conflict is also extended as believers determine to resist the conditions that would deny them this humanity in social and material terms. The *radical* element of passive radicalism which stands as an inherent part of the social analysis of the Church was also reinforced by an interview

question which asked respondents whether their faith helped them to deal with racism and injustice. Seven primary responses were collected and these were:

1. Faith offered comfort and encouragement; it encouraged the belief that God would open up a way, and inspired confidence.

2. Faith confirmed that the negative attitudes of society can be moderated through faith inspired behaviour.

3. Faith enabled an easing of the load and provided grace to bear oppression.

4. Faith confirmed the power of prayer as a lifeline.

5. Faith facilitated the mutual sharing and support at church which helped.

6. Faith enabled self empowerment

7. Faith reminded believers that ultimately oppression would be met by vengeance from God.

Collectively then, liberational faith manifested as passive radicalism provided believers with the necessary grace to bear discrimination and empowered them also to tackle and oppose it. Moreover, underlying both approaches was the confident understanding that nothing could stand in the way of what God wanted them to achieve.

The eschatology of the Churches which is most often cited as the most significant limitation to liberation did not, from the evidence of research findings, necessarily work in that way. Even where respondents felt strongly that oppression would never be eliminated in its earthly form, they nonetheless utilised passive radicalism to enable them to deal with its social consequences in the present time while awaiting a more permanent solution:

> I wouldn't say faith is a solution because you're going to always have injustice. It's just like an easing of a load...It's like you're adding oil to a wound, that's the way I see it...My faith helps in coping with difficult situations.[31]

> Its not going to get any better, its not supposed to. Faith eases it for me but I don't want to be in a comfortable position and say, oh, because God's looking out for me, stuff everybody else...As far as possible, if I can help somebody then I will.[32]

In keeping with its epistemological imperative, these kinds of views were often accompanied by accounts of personal experiences of overcoming oppression. In such instances the story was given in order to illustrate how the believer's personal life and Christ-like example could overcome and alter the oppressive behaviour of another individual or even an organisation. The key to this particular type of response is summed up succinctly by the following:

> I'm not really interested in fighting. I'm interested in winning and you don't necessarily have to fight to win. You can still get what you want, if you're really smart, without even fighting. You can end up in the position that you want to end up.[33]

Just how this winning without fighting takes place is essentially a matter of personal empowerment. A foundational element of the implicit social analysis of the BLC is an unshakeable confidence in the power of right to overcome wrong in concrete everyday experiences:

> I feel no way threatened by being Black...If its a White environment I feel as though they feel threatened by me...I know that, on a personal level, I'll always come through and that is really, for me, my faith in God. He always brings me through any problems that I have whether its racism or something else... As long as I'm in the right, I get God on the case and God deals with it and either He'll change their mind, move them out of the way or whatever it takes, but I'm coming through.[34]

> ...I know who I am in God. I'm special. If I wasn't a Christian I wouldn't believe so...So because I believe that God did so much for me then I've got that confidence. I'm a confident person because I know that I'm not by myself, I've got God on my side.[35]

> If you understand the true value of prayer then prayer does literally move mountains and it opens the doors so that you then need very little physical effort...You could be doing a lot of physical effort and just ending up with mountain after mountain to climb; just coming against brick walls. So for me, the first thing anybody ought to do is to pray about the situation and deal with it in a spiritual realm so that the physical wall will more or less come tumbling down.[36]

Social analysis through passive radicalism, then, indicates a clear engagement of the Church with the social realities of the believers. As has been evidenced from the responses of members and leaders of the Churches in the study thus far, the implicit social analysis not only identifies the hardships that exist for Black people in British society but also commits itself to a particular strategy for overcoming these difficulties through a process of self actualisation. This means that members are encouraged to pursue maximum educational achievement and to extend to the highest levels of their chosen careers. In practice this has resulted in a growing level of professional status of members within the Churches:

> As a Christian your faith helps you to believe in yourself that you can do anything according to your ability and according to the Lord's will. If you have a positive view of yourself and if you are encouraged by other people and if you are willing to be patient and work at it, then I think you can achieve anything. For instance in my church there are lots of very well educated people.[37]

The social analysis of the Church engages in something of a symbiotic relationship. Within the context of the life of the Church it enables believers to bring to bear, through spiritual expression, what they know cognitively and experientially, about the social world. At the same time, outside of the Church, believers carry with them what Joel Edwards has described as their "mobile

sanctuaries" which enable them to apply their spiritual imperatives to their social realities. It is in this way that passively radical social analysis is able to engender social, economic and political purpose. It undermines the ideologies of racism by reaffirming the holistically spiritual capabilities of each member, on their own and as supported by a like-minded group.

Through passively radical analysis the Church is able to react against the alienating effects of divide-and-rule influences inflicted on Black people throughout the history of their oppression. It not only asserts the basic humanity of all people and the special potential of men and women of God, but in so doing it also contradicts the processes of internalised racism so often manifested as self hate. It also combats the processes of disempowerment created by race, class and gender oppression by providing a source of divine and thereby superior power. This divine empowerment removes the believer from his and her marginalised position within British society and increases self worth which in turn inspires a greater vision for success in this world and the next.

The radical and liberational qualities of a social analysis based on passive radicalism, therefore, are pervasive and clear. However, since the nature of this liberation has nonetheless been described as passively radical then there are obviously some limitations to its manifestation. These will be explored now.

Limitations of Passively Radical Social Analysis

Regardless of the given benefits of the social analysis of the Church at pastoral and popular levels, its full liberational potential is hindered by the very nature and manifestation of its radicalism. This becomes distinct in three principle and related areas. Firstly, social analysis as passive radicalism has a uni-

dimensional understanding of social transformation. Secondly, it does not manifest itself in an explicit way, and thirdly, it contains no real "historico-analytical" element.[38]

1. A Uni-Dimensional Understanding of Social Transformation

The social analysis of the BLC is primarily geared towards creating and nurturing strategies of survival which serve to challenge the effectiveness of oppression in the lives of the believers. It does not, therefore, seek to dismantle systems of oppression but merely to develop appropriately resistant *responses* to them. James Cone has more closely defined this "art of survival" within the BLC experience:

> It is called *survival* because it is a way of remaining physically alive in a situation of oppression without losing one's dignity. We call it *grace* because we know it to be an unearned gift from him who is the giver of "every good and perfect gift." This is what Black people mean when they sing: "We've come this far by faith, leaning on the Lord, trusting in his holy Word."[39]

Whilst the radical implications of the strategy of survival for the individual believer have already been made apparent, it is nonetheless appropriate to describe "the art of survival" as a means of individuals *coping with* rather than *altering* oppressive structures within society. As such it is essentially a passively radical approach which carries with it further implications for the nature of liberation in society.

According to Boff and Boff, in order for liberation to be fully effective, it needs to capture for itself a "transforming energy... that will lead to individual change (conversion) and change in history (revolution)."[40] What passively radical social analysis does is to attempt to effect the second element by exclusive

dependence on the first. In other words, individuals who are transformed through repentance and conversion will eventually contribute towards a final, eschatological revolution. Such an approach results in what could be described as a uni-dimensional vision of societal transformation.

As has already been demonstrated from interview responses, sin is considered to be interchangeable with oppression in that the latter is very much a product of the former within the epistemology of the BLC. It follows, therefore, that the most consistent social analytical finding should be that change in the social world be experienced through a process of direct conversion of those who offend society by their oppression. Although, epistemologically, this conversion is both holistic and contextual in that it symbolises the repentance of the oppressor and a shift to their alignment with the oppressed[41], it needs, nonetheless, to be placed alongside wider strategies for societal transformation. A multi-dimensional vision of transformation would more easily accommodate change in the structures and systems of society as well as in offending individuals. Strategies with which a wider transformation could be achieved will be considered in latter discussions.

2. The Consequences of Non-Explicit Social Analysis

Passive radicalism means that social analysis, as has been described, takes place as an implicit, even subconscious, part of the Church's identity. Both congregation and pastor benefit from as well as contribute to its processes - but only occasionally is it formerly vocalised and explicitly identified as a key feature of BLC theological reality. There would appear to be two principle explanations for this and both of them relate to the contextual nature of development within the Churches as outlined previously in the themes of continuity and conflict and innovation and conservatism. To recap briefly, the idea of continuity reflects the

commitment of African Caribbean peoples to maintain a sense of self worth and identity by retaining the influence of an African heritage throughout their struggles in the 'New World.' This has also been defined broadly as an Afrocentric epistemology. Conflict, however, manifests itself in three distinct forms. Firstly, by the way in which this effort at maintaining humanity is forced to do battle with material and ideological forces of oppression which have the effect of denying such an humanity. Secondly, in the ideological pressure exerted by dominant theologies to ensure an 'authentic', largely fundamentalist, reading of theology. And thirdly through the legacy of a syncretised theological development which, having been created under the backdrop of ideological racism, has developed a kind of inherent ambiguity in its working out of liberational practice.

A perhaps inevitable outcome of conflict has been a dual force of innovation and conservatism which has come to symbolise the manifestation of liberation within the BLC. This is what essentially is being expressed in the term passive radicalism.

The first explanation for the implicit rather than explicit nature of social analysis within the Churches is that it facilitates the process of dual identity which has elsewhere been identified as double-speak.[42] On the slave plantations of the Caribbean, dual identity originated as a pragmatic means of giving the appearance of loyalty to the enforcement of doctrines and theologies which went blatantly against the enslaved African's commitment to continuity. After the abolition of slavery the pressures to conform to dominant theology altered from a physical to ideological plane as Eurocentric Christianity established itself as the bench mark for social status in the new society in the nineteenth and early

twentieth century. Nonetheless the continued experience of dual church membership was able to perpetuate believers' identification with two distinct theological traditions. In a contemporary British society which is increasingly pluralist and secular, however, this dual identity has not been motivated by physical threat or the search for social status. It has, therefore been able to contain itself within the religious experience of a single church body.

Consequently, what started out as a conscious and strategic manifestation of resistance has since become an implicit characteristic of BLC identity. In this way ACC believers take seriously their commitment to the dominant imperatives of fundamentalist faith as expressed, for example, through codes of morality, the language of 'authentic' Christian identity and, most significantly, the separation of secular and spiritual realities. For example, since Eurocentric fundamentalism regards its own theology as being universally valid, then the identification and articulation of a theology as being 'Black' or even 'liberational' involves transgressing against the completeness and legitimacy of the 'true gospel'. Since fundamentalism divides the world into spiritual and secular realms, then even to consciously identify with the cause of the socially oppressed - and certainly to seek a structural solution to their condition - is somehow to compromise one's commitment to spirituality. What this means, essentially, is that the explicit and vocalised identity of the BLC maintains a formal allegiance to the principles of dominant theology. This injects a critical level of conservatism into its theological expression thereby rendering the implications of liberational spirituality, implicit and passive. The spirit of continuity is advanced through the practical social analysis of the Church, and as such it continues to offer a serious critique of, and challenge to, dominant theology and the wider systems

of social oppression. However, since the message of radicalism is encoded by the requirements of dominant theology, these have to be deciphered by those external to the immediate BLC experience in order to be understood. This means that the fundamental identity of social analysis as a mechanism of holistic liberation for the BLC and the wider oppressed community is compromised.

The second possible explanation for radicalism as implicit within the Church returns the discussion to the ambiguous nature of syncretism as a liberational process. The central paradox which lies at the heart of ACC belief has already been identified. It is, in essence, that the syncretised faith of believers necessitates that they draw upon, as a tool for holistic liberation, a phenomenon which in its extracted form has been used as an ideological justification and instrument of their oppression.

It has already been suggested that the social analysis of the Church represents an epistemological approach which runs counter to that of positivist social science. However the very ambiguous nature of its syncretistic origins and development disable it from articulating a *consistently* holistic liberational challenge to wider hegemonies of domination. Hence the Church manifests behaviour which is sometimes innovative and liberational whilst at other times conservative. Occasionally it finds both manifestations in the same act.

One illustration of this is found in the Christology of the Church. Christ stands as a powerful symbol of divine deliverance and holistic salvation as has already been explored. The Pentecostal Churches sing the chorus "Jesus breaks every fetter and he will set you free." The young woman exhorter of the NTCG youth night service encouraged her fellow believers "to remember that with Jesus

we've got a 100% guarantee of deliverance."[43] It is clear from the research data and observation notes collected that the BLC's understanding of divine deliverance is an holistic one and yet the starting point for these liberating experiences is, for these believers, the blood of Jesus which washes them "Whiter than snow."[44] Liberational transformation then, often comes through the symbols of not just literal but ideological Whiteness. Whilst the portraits of a White, blue-eyed Jesus may no longer 'bless the houses' of the younger generation of believers it is harder to determine the extent to which the realness of such an image has been removed from their consciousness.

The connections that many of the BLCs continue to make with their White headquarter branches provide further illustration of the limiting influence of dominant theological values on the localised social analysis of the Churches in Britain. The WHC, SDA and NTCG, for example, regard themselves as members of an international religious network with standardised theologies and doctrines which are determined by these original or headquarter branches. In many instances international communication of ideas is maintained through official denominational journals such as the NTCG's *Church of God Evangel* which overviews the work of the Church around the world. In spite of the multi-cultural representation of the journal,[45] the epistemological approach of its theology is one which clearly rests comfortably within a wider hegemony of cultural imperialism. An edition in October 1991 for example carries an article entitled *Pursuit for God - Then and Now* which relates a brief history of men who have been motivated for world mission. The article's account begins with Christopher Columbus who had a "desire to serve Christ and carry His light to heathen lands."[46] It continues with the Pilgrims and Puritans in their journeying

to America "for the glory of God and the advancement of the Christian faith." [47] Another article in the same edition relates how "Africa, once considered the dark continent, is now receiving the light of the glorious gospel of Christ." [48] Such uncritical theological approaches are carried through in the articles of both Black and White contributors. Moreover, the essentially conservative fundamentalism represented in these dominant theologies are often brought even closer to home, and even to those denominations who don't have formal or historical links with such denominations, through the mission and healing campaigns of evangelist such as Morris Cerullo and Benny Hinn who are supported, in the main, by BLC members.

The unwillingness or inability of BLC theology to distance itself from dominant theology means therefore, as Shaw and Stewart have argued, that implicit social analysis runs the danger of having no "authentic niche" which is able to extend "beyond the reach of colonial power." [49] Hence whilst this study has thus far argued that syncretism in the Caribbean constituted the *first act* of Liberation Theology , it is also the case that this same act of syncretism has defined the nature of that theology. It has given it an internal ambiguity which highlights once again the sense of paradox within the liberational tradition of the BLC.

3. The Absence of an "Historico-Analytical" Approach

A third and final dimension of the *passive* component in passive radicalism is the absence of what Boff and Boff have referred to as a "historico-analytical" approach.[50] Within their introduction to Liberation Theology they use the terms historical and social analysis interchangeably however, for the purposes of this study, it is most useful to consider the historical elements of social analysis as a

separate entity. This more easily demonstrates the limitations of a passively radical approach to understanding the social world.

For Boff and Boff the purpose of engaging in historical analysis is to try to understand the reasons for oppression as it exists in the social world. A theologically liberative approach, therefore should either assess current theories which seek to understand the historical causes of oppression or should apply their own knowledge systems to the same task.

Although the Church does manifest a certain degree of historical awareness in terms of its own spiritual calling to Britain in the midst of a racist and morally and spiritually bankrupt society,[51] it does not appear to extend to a broader collective analysis of the historical processes of race, class and gender oppression. This is particularly the case at the popular level of liberational expression. The absence of historical analysis is partly supported by the afore-mentioned uni-dimensional approach to societal transformation. For example, since emphasis is placed on overcoming sin/oppression in the here and now, it becomes less important for believers to explore its historical causes or dimensions since those cannot be redeemed. Moreover, since conversion must ultimately come from an individual act of repentance both in the past and present, discussion on causes of oppression are limited to an understanding of individual rather than structural sinfulness. This further affects the degree of historical analysis in which the Church is able to engage.

As will be explored in the following section, although this lack is partially redressed through the process of critical reflection, it still means there is no consistent attempt at popular level to understand and acknowledge the roots of race, class and gender oppression as it has affected Black communities over the

years. This means that although contextual social analysis is able to tackle the contemporary conditions of oppression - and through that process to apply practical responses to those conditions - it fails to explore adequately the historical causes. In so doing it detracts from the holistic nature of that analysis and thereby contributes to its essentially passive nature.

Passive radicalism, then, suggests that although the BLC does engage in social analysis, it is limited in so doing by certain features which have themselves been part of its contextual development. The extent to which these shortcomings can be identified and addressed depend on the level of critical reflection which the Church can lay claim to. It is, therefore, to this criterion for liberation that the study will now turn.

D. Critical Reflection on Liberational Praxis as a Facilitator of Liberation

The fourth criterion for Liberation Theology is that the Church, having engaged in social analysis within the context of its oppression, should then be able to reflect critically on both the theory and the practice of its liberational experience. The previous section has described the social analysis of the BLC as being *radical* in that the internal structures of the Church are equipped with an African centred epistemology through which the experienced social realities of the believers are interpreted and responded to. This radicalism, however, is pacified somewhat by several factors. Firstly, social analysis within the Church does not appear to offer any historical analysis of the causes and nature of oppression. Secondly, it is implicit rather than overt and ubiquitous. And thirdly, it focuses on a single eschatological solution to the need for change in history. Assessing the extent and nature of critical reflection on liberational praxis is therefore largely a matter of determining the degree to which the limits of passive

radicalism have been acknowledged and addressed through the popular and pastoral levels of the Churches. A useful way of beginning such an assessment is by focusing in on some key pastoral responses.

A very significant way in which the BLC has begun the process of engaging in critical reflection of its praxis has been through the publication of texts written by pastors and leaders of various denominations in order to reflect on the development and progress of both their own experiences and those of their Churches in Britain. This development has gathered momentum in particular since the 1980s and one of its first contributions was produced by the one time National Director of Youth and Christian Education for the NTCG, Ira Brooks.

Reflecting in Print: Key Pastoral Responses

Ira Brooks, NTCG

Brooks has produced two studies. His first was published in 1982 and is a collection of documented statistics and developments celebrating twenty-five years of the NTCG in Britain.[52] It is, however, through his second publication[53] that he is able to offer some significant contributions to the process of critical reflection on the liberational praxis of, in particular, the NTCG but also on the wider Pentecostal and, indeed, the BLC tradition in Britain.

Brooks adopts a narrative and dialogical style which is in keeping with the epistemology of the BLC as previously defined. Through the tracing of his own spiritual journey from Anglicanism to Black Pentecostalism he is able to highlight the distinctions of the latter faith and, in the light of the *ethic of personal accountability*, to place himself, as it were, within those distinctions. Although his reflection does not formally identify those internal structures of the Church which enable it to be of holistically spiritual value to the believers, his own biographical

narrative, which runs for the first five chapters of the book, clearly provides evidence of his understanding of this. From this point the book covers a range of concerns which Brooks selects as imperative considerations for the developing Church. Key to his analysis are the following critical observations.

Brooks has a keen ear for the critical voice of youth from inside and outside of the BLC, and part of this involves acknowledging the accusations of socio-political irrelevancy made against the Church by young Rastafarians. One of his consistent themes is that which he perceives as a cultural and theological divide between the older, migrant generation within the Churches and their British-born offspring. According to Brooks this divide is represented by a number of factors but appears centred around two key issues. These are, firstly, youth resistance to Draconian doctrinal guidance which affects dress and behavioural codes and, secondly, an apparent adult complacency towards the need to articulate a response to social oppression - particularly racism - and to pursue a cultural identity. These two points are unexpectedly related since Brooks argues that it is in a sense the older members' compulsion with dated and often scripturally unsubstantiated rules that renders them unable or unwilling to engage in a conscious social dialogue which they fear may, on a practical level, serve to destabilise the spiritual foundation. The dependency on doctrine is in turn related to the Church's relationship with White American Pentecostalism as will soon be explored. However, rather than fearing the changes that may emerge from closer interaction of the young people with a social gospel, Brooks urges that they be encouraged to provide a prophetic voice for the Church as they struggle to work out a practical new theology.

It was the younger generations, according to Brooks, who, aware of the race related disturbances in America and South Africa in the sixties and seventies and caught up in their own struggles for equality and acceptance in Britain, "began to question the role of the Church in a fermenting society."[54] Their questioning, in turn, was able to highlight the responsibility of the Church, not only to its Christian youth but also to the social needs of the wider community. For Brooks, it acted as a catalyst for his own commitment to youth training and education and enabled him to critically reflect on his own theology and to engage in a Biblical hermeneutics which reflected the need for Black liberation. His conclusions are that "politics...being a necessary ingredient in the history of every nation, cannot be completely divorced from the Church."[55] The Church, therefore, needs to be doing more in order to actively engage in the struggles for Black liberation in the day-to-day lives of local communities:

> ...Black people in England should...face the fact that although some social hazards have been overcome, there are yet major obstacles in the path to social dignity. [56]

Failure to respond to this challenge, according to Brooks, will not only mean that the consequences of racism within the Churches and in society will continue to adversely effect Black communities but equally significantly it will result in the Churches becoming socially irrelevant ghettos for "elderly, frightened and inactive people."[57]

Secondly, Brooks' reflection offers a vital critique of the BLC's relationship with dominant theology in the form of the White American headquarter Churches. He traces a history of internal colonialism and segregation in American society and of Black opposition to these forces through the Civil Rights struggles and race

riots of the 1960s and 70s. From this basis he goes on to accuse the American Pentecostalists effectively of cultural imperialism in their assertion of authority over the selection of Church overseers in the British Churches. A significant focus of his criticism of the Churches is not merely their actions but also the more insidious theology upon which these actions are based. He overviews the historical development of racist, imperialist and Eurocentric theological thought and action and the detriment this has been to Black people - in particular to Black Christians. However, rather than leave the BLC in the role of innocent victim, Brooks implicates them as accessories in their own domination. He urges them, therefore, to make a long overdue and imperative affirmation of their autonomy which will challenge the racist assumptions that the relationship has nurtured for so long:

> ...Other races are finding it justifiable to treat others to their own convenience. Some even feel that they are helping God to carry out His Word! On the other hand, "freedom" would demand that Black-led Pentecostals take the dignified initiative, and free themselves by denouncing the master servant role of leadership. [58]

This uncritical connection of many BLCs with dominant theology, in Brooks' opinion, disables the extent to which they are able to develop explicit social programmes to resist the effects of racism. He draws on the experiences of independent Black denominations in Britain such as Shiloh Church of Christ Apostolic, New Testament Assembly and the Latter Rain Outpouring Revival to illustrate the extent to which these smaller fellowships, with no White headquarter ties, have been able to become proactive within the community environment.

Brooks argues that part of the necessary drive towards independent theological thought and development requires an end to financial aid from the American bodies, which come with any interference in the governing structures of the British Churches or any attached ideological strings. It also, requires Black leaders within the British Churches to re-evaluate their own theological practices which directly or indirectly perpetuate the Church's subservient role to dominant theology.

A third reflection which emerges from Brooks' study surrounds the need for the Church to reclaim and assert a collective historical memory according to Biblical precedents.[59] Having recounted the physical, mental and emotional toll of slavery on Black people, he argues that it is of significant detriment that the experience is so often wilfully ignored by the Churches in their contemporary experiences of racism. He argues, moreover, that whilst there is often pressure from dominant theology to submit to an unwrinkled image of Pentecostal harmony, Black ministers are too often uncritical accomodaters of this role:

> ...Some black church leaders have seen themselves caught up in the limelight of Ecclesiastical glory, and have therefore ceased to fully identify themselves with their history and culture. Some churchmen are deceived into thinking that it is unethical for Christians to speak out publicly against racism.[60]

Any division between the spiritual and social world therefore is, for Brooks, a harmful influence of dominant theology which substantiates the criticism of religion being "pie in the sky". Moreover it serves to further alienate Black youth inside and outside of the Church as they struggle for "justice and equal opportunities to determine their own lives."[61]

A fourth and particularly significant reflection Brooks makes concerns the Churches' role in not only acquiescing to the racism of dominant theology but of perpetuating their own systems of oppression in their treatment of women within their structures:

> If the ruling hierarchy of these churches are guilty of racism in the way they relate to their coloured counterpart, then, similarly, black leadership is guilty of sexism by its attitudes to female members collectively, but, especially those ladies who serve in active ministry of pastoring.[62]

Once again he traces a partial connection to the influence of dominant theology which, in the cases of headquarter links, is able to dictate certain policies which then have implications for the role of women in the British Churches thereby, in effect, instigating a policy of "divide and rule". These policies, nonetheless are further substantiated by the home-grown theologies, hermeneutics and practices which consolidate the marginalised position of women within the Churches in terms of headship. Brooks offers an alternative hermeneutics by tracing the roles of key women in scripture. He also highlights the changing and increasingly professional roles of many Black women in society and calls for the Church to remain socially relevant to the times. This request applies not only to the allocation of women as leaders but also to the doctrinal stresses which are placed on them with regard to dress and living codes. His reflection also draws attention to the highly responsible yet often uncelebrated role of the minister's wife.

Finally, Brooks' critical reflections highlight the largely under-explored issue of the Jamaican cultural dominance that often exists within the Churches to the detriment of other lesser represented cultures from the Caribbean and

elsewhere. For one Trinidadian pastor of a BLC this amounted to him experiencing identity as an "ethnic among ethnic people" and resulted in him having to "give up [his] culture and some other things [he] held dearly, and literally become a Jamaican."[63]

Brooks identifies the efforts of Black people both inside and outside of the Churches to maintain their cultural heritage as being an essential component of their wider struggle for self determination and humanity. However he warns against moves which impinge on the heterogeneity of the Churches (in which he includes the existence of White members) and, as he sees it, take away from the "higher identity of God, through Jesus Christ."[64]

Apart from his heavy reliance on Black American rather than Caribbean historical experience of racism and slavery, Brook's study provides an extremely useful illustration of critical reflection on liberational praxis within the BLC. His work attunes itself to most of the major developments which have affected the manifestation of Liberation Theology in Britain through the Churches. Most significantly it is possible to see how the implications of his discussions have received responses from subsequent developments within the Church. The formal control of the American headquarter Churches, for example, have decreased although not disappeared since the writing of his book. The Churches have, however, made a very tangible response to the request for an explicit social allegiance to the disadvantaged Black community. This has already been evidenced in the previous chapter's account of the various social and economic projects of the Churches. These more recent developments are, in turn, given critical reflection by another minister of the NTCG, Selwyn Arnold.

Selwyn Arnold, NTCG

Selwyn Arnold's study[65] takes the form of a description and review of a specific project which stemmed from the Church's attempt at making an explicit connection of its spiritual identity with the social needs of the Black community in Britain. As such it takes the form of a history in progress in which critical reflection on praxis is itself combined with reflection on further liberational praxis. In common with Brooks, Arnold's central concern is a critical reflection on the identity of the Church which responds to the increasingly disaffected youth of the denomination in particular but also of society at large. Having introduced his study with a brief history of the Black presence in Britain over the past two hundred years, Arnold begins his reflection on the post war establishment of the NTCG as a movement meeting the spiritual and social needs of the first generation of Caribbean migrants. As this dissertation has itself explored, Arnold argues that for this first generation of believers, their theological identity was an essential tool in making sense of the discrimination and alienation they experienced in British society. This meant that racism and oppression were perceived as sin and their experience of it was therefore a Biblically forewarned persecution for living an upright Christian life - an inevitable reality of the daily "suffering for the Name of Christ."[66] For the children and grandchildren of these migrants, however, Arnold explains this theological analysis became insufficient as an explanation and response to their continued experiences of disadvantage, alienation and ideological oppression. Their disillusionment began to affect the very nature of existence of the Church and this manifested itself in a decline in numbers after two decades of steady growth.

The response of the Church, therefore, has been to create a national series of 'site' teams who have responsibility for tapping into the concerns of young people within the churches nationally and feeding them back to a centralised body. This body would then reflect on and put forward recommendations for appropriate social policies for the national denomination. In his study, Arnold reflects, that as a result of this programme the team was forced to acknowledge the Church's failure to deal adequately with the social realities of its believers:

> The NTCG, having severed itself from the policy making bodies of this country had failed to make any important contribution to its people's struggle for survival...There had been such an emphasis on preparing people for heaven that we had neglected to prepare them to live and participate in our present-day society, and assist in any meaningful change.[67]

The next task of the team project was, to encourage the structures which would effect change within the practical theologies of the churches. This process focused itself around two key goals. The first was to increase the amount of social activities and services the churches provided for the wider Black community; the second was to promote, amongst the Black churched and non churched community, an awareness of the need for collection co-operation and enterprise.

Arnold's study is based on his reflection on the processes which went towards fulfilling these two objectives and which led to a nation-wide increase in social projects (only some of which have been previously identified in this study). The exercise, which began in 1986 with the National Ministers Conference's endorsement of the *Department of Social Responsibility* and its *National Community Action Programme*, was a significant and experienced-based

illustration of the Church's engagement with social analysis. It was underpinned by the notion that "racism has been used politically and economically to justify domination, inequality and discrimination by one group of people to the detriment of the other."[68] Moreover the Church held that "the NTCG must accept the challenge to respond to racism in the society, not only for its own survival, but because racism is alien to the principles of the gospel of Christ."[69]

For Arnold it also represented a significant hermeneutical shift in the Church, one in which it was able to take full responsibility for its former social inertia and commit itself to a new social ideal. Arnold is, however, quick to point out what he regards to be the necessary framework or limitations of this new hermeneutical emphasis. Firstly, it must start by reclaiming God as the first and original source of all power. Secondly, it must not, ultimately, stray from the Pentecostal distinctive of an eschatological hope of better things to come: the future fulfilment of the Kingdom of God in which sin and injustice will completely be destroyed. Thirdly, whilst it acknowledges the harmful effect of what Arnold terms "colonial theology", it should neither "jump on the bandwagon" of American or Latin American liberation theologies which make, in his view, too strong a commitment to political progress at the expense of spiritual grounding:

> The NTCG must uphold the Biblical mandate to preach the gospel, for only in so doing would the church maintain its evangelical vision. But it must also now look at the implications of this gospel; not only in spiritual terms, but in the basic literal principles of human life and experience.[70]

As his study reveals, the results from both the project itself and the theological process which supported it appear to be twofold. Firstly there is a contextual application of the gospel to the social needs of Black communities in Britain so

that, for example, the needs most clearly identified by the church and the community are being addressed by the social action programme. This has meant a substantial increase in housing and care projects for the elderly and educational and recreational projects for the young in addition to a range of employment and training schemes for the unemployed. Secondly, the Church has encouraged a conscious mobilisation of its youth which is intended to benefit the wider Black community:

> This generation must demand equal participation in the affairs of this country and seek not just what they can acquire for themselves, but what they can contribute to making the society a better one...This is the land of their birth and they have to establish themselves and be a part of it. The NTCG must endeavour to assist them to establish themselves and contribute their share to building this nation.[71]

Such a promise of mobilised activity, moreover, carries with it an increased demand for the leaders and pastors of the churches to be theologically prepared and personally committed.

Arnold's reflections provide a useful update and response to Brooks' study in that it attempts to analyse the theological rationale behind the more recent movement of his denomination towards increased social activity. In so doing his arguments provide insight into other BLCs who, as the previous chapter has illustrated, have made similar moves in recent years. An analysis of the implications of both studies will form a central part of the discussion on a new kind of radicalism required in the Churches. However before engaging in this exploration it is useful to examine one further pastoral contribution to critical reflection with the BLC.

Io Smith, New Testament Assembly

Smith[72] has produced an autobiographical account of her experience in Britain as a migrant and as a Black women pastor of an independent BLC in London. Particularly for this last reason it is worth overviewing as a representation of the female voice in the critical reflection of the BLC.

Apart from the autobiographical style, her work differs significantly from that of Brooks and Arnold in that she focuses throughout on what this dissertation has identified as the passively radical function of the Church for Black Christians in Britain. Utilising the pervasive themes of discrimination, isolation and racism, Smith traces her journey from the Caribbean to Britain and her struggles, once here, to achieve self actualisation for herself, her children and her community. Throughout this process the BLC acts as the "tiger in [her] tank"[73], providing the fellowship, support and extended kinship relationships which enable her and others to overcome the many tangible social obstacles placed against them:

> To see somebody praying and preaching is outstanding but to see somebody taking my baby and holding it in their arms gave me a feeling of family...All this was more than just preaching the gospel. They acted out the gospel they preached. This implanted something real in me. To love the Pentecostal church.[74]

Her study suggests that, from its origins in Britain, the BLC has had an in-built capacity to amalgamate theological imperatives with the social realities of the believers. In her own Church experience this was a reality in terms of both pastoral and congregational support. In this way the Church of the 1950s and 60s served as both a spiritual and material life raft for Black communities in Britain, catering for the spiritual and social needs which exposure to a racist and hostile society *and* Church had so manifestly created.

According to Smith's account, The BLC responded to social needs not simply in terms of the supportive internal structures provided for its active members, but also through a consistent programme of evangelism which, in effect, took the social benefits of the Church out to isolated individuals and subsequently to communities. For these reasons Smith rejects those "indigenous" critics of the Church who argue that it has no social gospel. She believes strongly that the Churches are:

> ...among the most outstanding and powerful black organisations...They are in the communities of Britain as a tower of strength and support for people of all colours, tribes and races."[75]

This is borne out for her by the many examples of social and pastoral care the Church has afforded generations of people in the past four decades of its existence.

Smith, however, is not totally uncritical of the nature of development of the Churches and this is particularly apparent in her analysis of their attitude to women in leadership. Having first pointed out the significant contribution that women have made to the Churches over the years, Smith initially argues that the acceptance of women leaders in her own and other BLC denominations compares favourably with that of the TBC. However she then points out the way in which patriarchal values predominate attitudes regarding the general position of women both within the Churches and in the domestic arena. She calls for a re-valuation of theological principles and general attitudes of both men and women which will allow for a real sense of sharing to prevail in both areas. Liberation, she argues, must be achieved "from the heart" before it effects real

change in the structures of the Church and society and this is often the responsibility of the women's own sense of themselves:

> In the Church I experience total freedom to work alongside men as their equal. I do not see myself as being in bondage or trapped. I feel quite free and confident...I hope that women will look again at the little corner of the Church where they have been pushed and be careful that they are not really accepting a defeat when it comes to working and standing up for the kingdom of God.[76]

This same sense of personal responsibility and theological obligation is what, Smith argues, is required by the Church with regard to its attitude towards the contemporary problems of race in Britain. She is critical of the levels of ideological racism, and economic and social discrimination which continue to affect new generations of Black people through key British institutions by acting almost as unofficial forms of apartheid in their denial of Black peoples' rights and humanity. However she is also scathing of the role of TBC and of dominant theology in helping to perpetuate these racist and discriminatory practices within society. Although she calls for a greater sense of accountability and understanding from White Christians, she also calls on the BLC themselves to take up, in a more explicit way, their Biblically precedented prophetic imperative. This is particularly the case for those Black professionals who have already been able to benefit from what the Church has had to offer them. Smith argues that they need to remember that God's people are those who are oppressed and marginalised regardless of whether they come to church or not. It is therefore the responsibility of the BLC, who have already done so much, to do even more in order to fulfil God's requirement of them.

Academic Reflections on the BLC

A further development in critical reflection from within the BLC in recent years has been the writing of academic theses which seek to focus on key issues of the BLCs development in Britain. The studies of Foster and Tomlin are two such examples of this.

Tomlin's M. Phil. study[77] focuses on the content of Black preaching styles within the BLCs in Britain. She identifies and traces a close connection between elements of African spirituality and the development of the Pentecostal movement which, she argues, have been passed on within the spiritual identity of the BLC in Britain; in particular she focuses on the NTCG and FUCJCA. Through her study Tomlin seeks to demonstrate that the African influenced spiritual manifestations of song, dance, call and response, concept of time and of self in addition to specific church liturgy, constitute a Black Theology which is further consolidated through the linguistic use of Creole. In so doing she is critical of those theologians and social analysts, particularly Calley and Hill, who portray an "inaccurate and exotic" worship style among the Churches.[78]

Like Kalilombe, Macrobert and Gerloff, Tomlin identifies a dichotomy between the "published and hidden" [79] theology of the Churches. She recognises too the extent to which this becomes more apparent in those Churches, such as NTCG, which have maintained links with their headquarter branches. In her emphasis on the "cognitive allegiance to such fundamentalist statements" as opposed to the "behavioural manifestations which show their continuing commitment to the black leitmotif"[80], Tomlin is very close in her analysis to Macrobert. However, in setting apart the leitmotif of the BLCs as a manifestation of Black *Theology*, by implication at least, she acknowledges a cognitive element to the experience of

liberation within the Churches which does not render it completely experiential and anti-intellectual.

Foster's dissertation, like Smith's study, focuses her reflection on the experiences of women within the Churches.[81] She firstly provides a history of Black women's migration to Britain and their involvement in the early stages of the BLC through which she illustrates how the powerful mutual support systems created by women within the Churches actually served indirectly to exclude men. She goes on to emphasise how women not only contributed to, but in effect were the mainstay of, the Churches in terms of their social, spiritual and financial involvement. As such she identifies women as being the predominant perpetrators of liberational spirituality:

> Women have created the socio-spiritual context in which the social spiritual and emotional needs of the congregation and at times the wider black community are taken care of. [82]

Like Smith, Foster critiques the patriarchal structures of the Churches which, with the possible exception of the WHC[83], perpetuates male interests behind the protection of doctrine. She, too, urges both men and women to challenge this oppressive hegemony which exists within the Churches. Her work is highly critical of the manifestation of liberation within the Churches. She regards the moves into concrete social ministry as being largely "reactive rather than proactive."[84] The Churches have not, she believes, engaged in social analysis since they have not offered any serious explication of the underlying causes of their oppression; racism, sexism or class exploitation in British society. The reason for this is easily identified when one examines the fundamentalist theological roots of many of these Churches which are uncomfortable with any

explicit connection with overt political action. The solution, for Foster, is a conscious contextualising of theology which will build on the "undeniable interface between the concrete experiences of the everyday material life and the spiritual life of Black people in Britain."[85] This can be partially achieved through a dialogical relationship with other - in particular Black American - Liberation Theologies.

With regards to the position of women, she argues that there does exist an implicit level of Womanist Theology within the Churches in which women seek to emulate the female qualities in Jesus; "his love, obedience, faithfulness, mercifulness, compassion and humility."[86] These beginnings, she reflects, need to become a more explicit and consistent part of the theology of the Church.

Foster's reflection on the BLC in Britain, whilst critical and demanding nonetheless does acknowledge the seedbed of radicalism within the development of the Church to date. She recognises, for example, the liberationary implications of the act of salvation within the Churches which sees the believer rejecting the status quo and entering into a community of believers with roles and responsibilities which assist them in being better able to respond to their social context. Hence whilst overt radicalism has yet to emerge within the Churches there are, nonetheless, "actions that are indicative of freedom and symbolically liberational."[87] Nonetheless, like Brooks, Arnold and Smith, she warns, of the danger of social irrelevance which looms ahead of the Church if they continue to encourage a privatistic theology which promotes individual social mobility at the expense of wider community liberation.

These studies are soon to be joined by at least two works currently in progress by members of the BLC. The work of David Muir from the NTCG in London and

Robert Beckford from an independent Trinitarian Fellowship in Birmingham will seek to provide a contemporary critical reflection of liberational praxis within the Churches in Britain and will focus in particular on the areas of political theology and Black mobilisation. Their contributions will be of particular significance in the light of the role played by these theologians in the development of Liberation Theology at its professional level in Britain, as will later be explored.

What these pastoral and academic studies reveal is that the BLC, in its collective identity at least, does clearly meet the criteria for liberation which focuses on the need for theologians of liberation to engage in critical reflection of their praxis. Moreover, as is apparent from Arnold's study, the process of critical reflection is not limited to published texts but is manifested within the formal and informal structures of the local and national Church bodies. This is important to note since the selections identified here reveal a clear omission of such material from the Adventist, Holiness and Apostolic traditions. Reflection and reassessment of direction within the Churches is a regular and important part of the mission services, the anniversary services, the annual conventions and, particularly significantly, the newer cultural awareness services such as those previously outlined in the WHC and SDA. It can therefore be claimed that this criterion for liberation is fulfilled within the Churches at popular, pastoral and academic levels.

It is also important to note the consequences of such critical reflection within the Churches since what becomes apparent from the above studies is that it has actually provided a practical platform for change. The Churches have listened to their dissenting voices and at least begun the process of responding to the challenges they have made. Hence critical reflection has directly influenced the

course of further liberational praxis. On a popular level this is most clearly demonstrated by the questionnaire and interview responses of this present study in which both younger and older participants were clearly able to articulate the varied ways in which their Church assisted them in their own social and spiritual liberational processes. This stands in contrast to, for example, the initial findings of Brooks or Arnold who arguably reflected a more pessimistic outlook on the Church's role in encouraging liberative change amongst its members even on an implicit level. Reflection therefore has constituted change, and change has led to a greater awareness of (or at least a greater ability to articulate) the implicit processes of liberation in the day-to-day realities of the believers.

Acknowledging Passive Radicalism, Identifying Active Radicalism

Much of the above discussion identified the implicit way in which the BLC has enabled believers to make sense of and respond to the realities of oppression within their social and economic existence. Foster's study comes closest to identifying this as a structural form of liberation within the Churches. It is perhaps ironic that the studies of Selwyn Arnold in particular, and to a lesser extent that of Ira Brooks, in their attempt to propose a radical reconstruction of social policy within the Churches, fail to fully acknowledge the fundamental and pervasive level at which these Churches have already served to undermine the ideology and practice of racism. They appear to give no - or at least little - formal acknowledgement of the passively radical implications of a liberational spirituality which, as this dissertation has already suggested, has created the foundation block for liberational experience throughout the development of the

Church. There exist, therefore, two significant observations that must be drawn from these analyses.

On the one hand it suggests that passive radicalism has operated as such an implicit and subconscious part of the BLC experience that it is often invisible to those who are actually principally engaged in its manifestation. Hence when Arnold argues that "the NTCG leaders need to recognize that one can better serve the community and assist in building the Kingdom of God not by separating the material from the spiritual, but by allowing the spiritual to impact upon the material,"[88] he is confirming a process which has already been an implicit part of the reality of liberational spirituality within the Church. The need, therefore, is not so much to *create* a new consciousness in the leaders of the Church as to *make explicit* an experiential and cognitive liberational spirituality which has, in effect, been marginalised in the BLC's articulated and conscious theology. It is the dichotomy between a *theology* influenced by fundamentalist imperatives from a dominant Western source and a *spirituality* which operates within an African centred epistemology which needs to be removed in order for fully contextual and holistic liberation to be achieved.

On the other hand the perspective highlights the urgency with which the BLC needs to begin to critically evaluate its doctrinal and theological links with dominant Western theologies if it is to fully embrace the kind of liberation required by the needs of the communities it seeks to represent. Although Arnold appears himself to be willing to respond to the challenges of rethinking theology in the light of the contextual needs of the socially marginalised, he nonetheless emphasizes the general reluctance which exists within the Churches when the very conditions of membership and leadership status so often "requires the full

acceptance of all the traditionally held theologies *without critical reflection."*[89] This reluctance, however, must be overcome if the social interaction of the BLC (even in the form of the services which have emerged in recent years) is to become more than a marginalised appendage emerging from implicit convictions.

What Brooks achieves in his study, with perhaps a stronger sense of urgency than Arnold, is a denouncement of the BLC's acquiescence of dominant theology. Such a denouncement amounts to a rejection of a radicalism within the Churches which is doomed to remain implicit and thereby passive because it is itself oppressed by the dictates of an historically exploitative theology. The alternative lies in the BLC embracing the principles of an explicit, fully conscious and thereby *active radicalism* which removes the need for a dualist and partially conditional approach to Black liberation.

Active Radicalism

An actively radical approach to liberation would involve building on the foundations of liberational spirituality which lies at the heart of passive radicalism. Whilst retaining an African epistemological centre, an actively radical impetus would, nonetheless, broaden the scope of social analysis, providing it with a multi-dimensional insight into social transformation and allowing for the possibility of an historico-analytical element to be added to its method of interpreting the social world.

Above all, active radicalism is uncompromised radicalism. To borrow from sociological analysis, it turns what might be described as the latent functions of the BLC into manifest functions. However, with a twist to traditional structural-functionalist readings, it means that, in becoming manifest, it is now able to

more effectively undermine the oppressive hegemonic practices of society which in its latent state it could only attempt to *cope with* and *survive* under. Believer's are able to recognise therefore that liberation must address structures of oppression as well as provide personal empowerment for individual advancement. To this extent, the cognitive appropriation of liberation is represented as something of a journey. It begins with the personal conviction that the individual is made in the image of God and therefore of worth and value. It continues through the exploration of Biblical hermeneutics in which believers are able to understand that God is "no respecter of persons." It then comes to fruition with a conscious theological understanding of God's alignment with the struggles of the oppressed and the conviction, therefore, that the Church has both a divine calling and a social responsibility to speak out against oppression in the Church and in society.

As a personal conviction which leads to the pursuit of a life long journey, active radicalism serves to heighten both spiritual and theological consciousness, allowing it to incorporate the entirety of the human experience, both metaphysical and material. As SPF's Pastor Corbett observed:

> The social gospel to me is very important. I cannot see how a man of God can preach a spiritual gospel without preaching a social gospel. It's like I bring in an electrician and I want light. He puts wire in and calls it a positive, you can't get light out of it, you must put in the negative as well and by putting those two together you get light. The positive gospel is there, but both parts must be there to make a human being because God is concerned about the whole man.[90]

This means that an explicit theology need not lose touch with its eschatological convictions; it need only include them within a wider, multi-dimensional understanding of societal transformation.

This chapter's opening quotations appropriately reflect the challenge of liberational identity within the BLCs in Britain. The first points to a significant radical heritage of the Church which the term passive radicalism is intended to define and affirm. The second, however, whilst implicitly acknowledging that radicalism, asserts the need to construct from its foundation something which more holistically engages in the demands of liberation. To this extent, the central charge of active radicalism is that the BLC has an obligation to consciously recognise itself *as a BLC* and to act accordingly. This requires it to adopt and maintain a spirituality, theology and social ministry that represents the needs and reflects the heritage of those African Caribbean people who seek to engage in the struggle for liberation.

Notes and References

[1] Interview respondent, SPF.

[2] Interview respondent, NTCG.

[3] Hill, op. cit, (1963) pg. 74.

[4] Calley, op. cit, pg. 121.

[5] Ibid, pg. 145. (italics my emphasis).

[6] Ibid.

[7] Roswith Gerloff has written several articles on the development of the BLC in Britain. However her most significant contribution in this area is the substantial research thesis, **A Plea For British Black Theologies: The Black Church Movement in Britain in its Transatlantic, Cultural and Theological Interaction with Special Reference to the Pentecostal Oneness (Apostolic) and Sabbatarian Movements**, (PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 1991).

[8] Iain Macrobert has also published various articles and contributed to texts on religion in Britain. His major works are **The Spirit and the Wall: The Black Roots and White Racism of Early Pentecostalism in the U.S.A.** (MA dissertation, University of Birmingham, 1985) and **Black Pentecostalism: Its Origins, Functions and Theology: With Special Reference to a Midland Borough,** (PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 1989).

[9] Gerloff, *The Black Church Experience in Britain* in **Christian Action Journal,** (Autumn 1982, pg. 10).

[10] For example its rootedness in Biblical faith and in African Culture. See Gerloff, op. cit, (1991) pgs. 230-231.

[11] Macrobert, op. cit, (1989) pg. 2.

[12] This is a central theme in both of his major studies.

[13] John Wilkenson, op. cit, identifies Black Christian faith as being "a religion of the spirit". In its liberative role "its truth is not disclosed through speculative theology but through participation in the suffering and struggles of the oppressed. " pg. 14.

[14] Roy Kerridge, **The Storm is Passing Over, A Look at Black Churches in Britain,** (Thames and Hudson, 1995).

[15] Cecil Cone, **The Identity Crisis in Black Theology**. Cone's warning against understanding only a partial identity of the Black Church was used by Elaine Foster in the context of the Church in Britain. See Elaine Foster in Grant and Patel (1990) pg. 60.

[16] Macrobert in Badham, op. cit, pg. 129.

[17] Foster, op. cit, (1990) pg. 58.

[18] Selwyn Arnold, **From Scepticism to Hope, One Black Led Church's Response to Social Responsibility**, (Grove Books Ltd, 1992), Foster, ibid and Ira Brooks, op.cit. (no date supplied).

[19] Collins, op.cit.

[20] Ibid, pg. 203.

[21] Ibid, pgs. 208-217.

[22] Ibid, pg. 208.

[23] Ibid, pg. 215.

[24] Ibid, pg. 219.

[25] Boff and Boff, op. cit, pg. 27.

[26] Interview respondent, SPF.

[27] Interview respondent, FUCJCA.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Interview respondent, NTCG.

[30] Interview respondent, FUCJCA.

[31] Interview respondent, NTCG.

[32] Interview respondent, FUCJCA.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Interview respondent, SPF.

[36] Interview respondent, FUCJCA.

[37] Ibid.

[38] This phrase is used by Boff and Boff in their description of social analysis, op. cit, pg. 24.

[39] Cone, op. cit (1975), pg. 2.

[40] Boff and Boff, op. cit, pg. 34.

[41] This kind of solidarity of the former oppressor with the oppressed is described by Freire as a prerequisite for liberation. He writes; "The oppressor shows solidarity with the oppressed only when he stops regarding the oppressed as an abstract category...when he stops making pious, sentimental, and individualistic gestures and risks an act of love." (Freire, op. cit, pg. 26). In this

way the conversion experience becomes a political act of repentance; carrying with it the assumption that the convertee will now 'walk right and live right.'

[42] See Macrobert, op. cit, (1989) also Bishop Kalilombe, **Centre for Black and White Christian Partnership Journal**, op. cit.

[43] Taken from transcription of NTCG Youth service. See appendices.

[44] Taken from a popular chorus.

[45] The edition mentioned carried a cover photograph of a Black family and inside the articles featured a fair number of Black evangelist.

[46] J. D. Golden, **Church of God Evangel**, (October 1, 1991 pg. 14).

[47] Ibid.

[48] Martha Wong, in ibid, pg. 11.

[49] Shaw and Stewart, op. cit, pg. 21.

[50] Boff and Boff, op cit, pg. 24.

[51] For example the understanding of the early Church believers that they were brought to England "for such a time as this", as was related by the former head of ACEA, Joel Edwards.

[52] Brooks, op.cit. (1982).

[53] Brooks, op.cit. (no date supplied).

[54] Ibid, pg. 38.

[55] Ibid, pg. 48.

[56] Ibid, pg. 70.

[57] Ibid, pg. 98.

[58] Ibid, pg. 93.

[59] For example, the children of Israel coming out of Egypt.

[60] Ibid, pg. 62.

[61] Ibid, pg. 96.

[62] Ibid, pg. 109.

[63] Ibid, pg. 75.

[64] Ibid, pg. 76.

[65] Arnold, op. cit.

[66] Ibid, pg. 26.

[67] Ibid, pg. 35.

[68] Ibid, pg. 48.

[69] Ibid, pg. 51.

[70] Ibid, pg. 61.

[71] Ibid, pg. 85.

[72] Io Smith, **An Ebony Cross, Being a Black Christian in Britain Today**, (Marshall Pickering, 1989).

[73] Ibid, pg. 44.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Ibid, pg. 123.

[76] Ibid, pg. 115.

[77] Tomlin, op.cit, (1988).

[78] Ibid, pg. 50.

[79] Ibid, pg. 133.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Foster, op.cit, (1990).

[82] Ibid, pg. 54.

[83] She does not focus on all five of the denominations with which this study is concerned.

[84] Ibid, pg. 95.

[85] Ibid, pg. 133.

[86] Ibid, pg. 192.

[87] Ibid, pg. 193.

[88] Arnold, op. cit, pg. 55.

[89] Ibid, my italics.

[90] Pastor Corbett, op. cit.

CHAPTER SIX: LIBERATION IN PROGRESS: CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

> ***...The challenge of singleness for our women...The criminalization of our race, the emasculation of our young...demands that as black church leaders we take up the challenge. All of this compounded with the universality of the good news that we have a command or commission to preach...means that there is much to be done. All of these call for a cohesive and a comprehensive strategy or strategies. We have to be able to facilitate, enable and resource one another. We cannot sit on our laurels and say that the church is growing.***[1]

The progress of social analysis and critical reflection within the Churches has led to a growing awareness, amongst many leaders and lay members, of a need to broaden the spectrum of social activity in which the Church engages. As the above quotation points out, there is a call for the development of functioning strategies of liberation that will impact more systematically on oppressed communities and will respond to the theological imperatives of the Church. This chapter is concerned with applying the final two criteria for Liberation Theology to the context of the Church in Britain in order to identify ways in which the above challenge is being met within the Churches. In following on from criteria A-D, therefore, focus will now be turned upon the contentions that: (E) *Liberation Theology must be dialogical and ecumenical in its approach. And (F) Liberation needs to manifest itself at popular, pastoral and professional levels and each level must contribute, sustain and nurture the other in the overall pursuit of liberation.*

E. Liberation Theology as Dialogical and Ecumenical Theology

The previous chapter has put forward the claim that the social analysis of the Church can best be understood through an alternative epistemological

framework. One element of this epistemology, moreover, has been identified as a dialogical imperative which means that the way the BLC makes sense of its social realities is highly dependent upon the connectedness of members within the local and increasingly also the national and even international Church communities. The internal characteristics from which the Church's liberative spirituality is compiled are founded upon the imperative of dialogue/communication. This means that in identifying the key features of this spirituality thus far, this study has already made a partial response to this fifth criterion for liberation. In order to complete the exploration here, it is appropriate to focus on the attempts made by the BLC to expand the principle of dialogue firstly within its own internal networks, and secondly to key groups external to these networks.

Before commencing this task it is important to focus briefly on the distinctive features of the criteria; in particular to clarify the relationship between ecumenicalism, dialogue and liberation. Ecumenicalism, in this context, refers to the concept of Church unity. It is understood, however, that within the broader context of liberation, this unity must be tempered with dialogue through which the foundational cause of liberation might best be negotiated.[2] The imperative for ecumenicalism, it can be argued, stems from four significant principles. First is the understanding that a liberational theology must continually build upon its awareness of local and global oppression issues in order to ensure that its own liberation and analysis is holistic and critical.[3] Second is the need to challenge the negative effects of an externally imposed denominationalism on the process

of collective mobilisation.[4] Third is the need for those who seek to engage in Liberation Theology to maintain critical communication with dominant theology in order to promote the cause of liberation amongst those who knowingly or unknowingly perpetuate oppression. In particular, this demands engaging with those White Christians who seek to tackle oppression through their own networks.[5] Fourthly, in summary and through the application of each of the above ministries, is the need to combine and maintain both a priestly and prophetic function throughout the ecumenical process. In its role as Priest, ecumenical dialogue serves as a means of demonstrating that, as Brown has argued in summarising Gutierriez' argument, "God is free of the petty limitations with which theologians seek to circumscribe divine activity."[6] Priesthood, therefore is the stimulus for reconciliation, the mutual recognition of the greatness of God and the "gratuitousness of creative love."[7] The Prophetic voice of ecumenicalism is inextricably connected to the requirements of justice. As such it has two functions: it stands in explicit opposition to forms of injustice in society and also it engages in critical reflection on the manifestation of liberation within its own ecumenical framework.

Since the requirements of ecumenicalism are manifested in these four separate forms it is necessary also for the nature of dialogue to be guided by these individual requirements. Rather than being uniform and identical in all four instances, therefore, ecumenicalism should develop contextually according to the dictates of the progress of liberation. The Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), for example, developed as a means of exploring

the liberational concerns of 'third world' theology without the restrictions that were so often placed upon contextual exploration at broader ecumenical meeting points. It also, nonetheless, had to overcome its own internal divisions caused by the contributors' alignment to their own narrowly contextual oppression concerns.[8] The dictates of liberational progress in this instance meant that ecumenicalism should exclude White European and American theologians and that it should also focus on the global issue of liberation of the poor from poverty rather than the national or regional concerns consolidated under a smaller scale ecumenicalism.

In this way ecumenicalism itself needs to be understood contextually and dialogue must serve as an appropriate negotiating tool for those contexts. This is the underlying premise from which these concepts are applied to the BLC in Britain.

Dialogue and Ecumenicalism Within the BLC

One function of ecumenicalism, then, is to break down the barriers created by doctrinal or liturgical divisions that exist between different denominations of BLCs. The aim in so doing is to enable them to better identify and respond to their common relationship with oppressed communities inside and outside of their Churches. As always it is important, when trying to assess the extent to which the BLC has taken up this challenge, to distinguish between popular, pastoral and professional manifestations and responses. On a popular level, many of the Churches have, in recent years, experienced an increase in the number of activities which have encouraged interdenominational fellowship and

sharing. This has meant, for example, that the more traditional meeting points of gospel concerts, choirs and special services have been expanded into a wider social network including dating agencies and social clubs.[9] However at a combination of pastoral and popular levels there has also been a significant increase in organised interdenominational programmes aiming not simply to promote ecumenical fellowship but also an increased awareness and exploration of issues of social concern. These are sometimes informal projects taking the form of discussion or prayer support groups. Very often they are initiated by young individuals from a wider variety of Churches than would perhaps come together under more conventional circumstances. At least two such organisations have been identified within the past year in the West Midlands.[10] There also exist, however, more formalised ecumenical moves and one very pertinent illustration of this is provided by two initiatives of the African Caribbean Evangelical Alliance (ACEA).

1. From Accord To Highway

For the first four years of the present decade the ACEA-initiated *Accord* celebration provided an annual meeting place for an increasing collection of BLCs from around the country. The Churches met together to enjoy communal worship and praise. However, in addition to this more conventional function, *Accord* also provided a space for dialogue on various aspects of the work of the BLC in Britain. In particular it focused on its relationship to the wider African Caribbean community.

With themes such as "The Church in the Community" and "Taking hold of the

Future", the meetings focused on issues such as mental health, prison service and drug addiction.[11] Their primary significance is found in the way both the themes themselves and the actual gatherings served to promote a solidarity amongst the Churches as they sought to reinforce their commitment to practical community action. As Joel Edwards, the General Secretary of ACEA during these years has, commented:

> As we look on at difficulties facing our world we are increasingly being asked to consider the significance of our role in the wider society. The task of being "Salt and Light" is ours to fulfil in the wider community. The Church must also see itself as a community with the potential for unity in diversity. A vision of a Church community united by the spirit and bound together in purpose and heart is a vision worth striving for. That is the vision of ACCORD.[12]

Accord has, in recent years, been superseded by the *Highway* conference which, while maintaining an evening worship and celebration component, focuses even more specifically on exploring a range of topical social issues with, in particular, the younger generations of the BLC. The annual conference clearly demonstrates how liberational spirituality can itself become an in-road into heightened social awareness and radicalism. These developments, moreover, form only part of the dialogical activities of ACEA which itself is one of three significant ecumenical programmes representing pastoral and popular level liberational activity in the BLC. These are explored below.

2. African Caribbean Evangelical Alliance

Established in London in 1984 out of a meeting of over thirty BLC leaders,

ACEA has among its stated aims "to provide a network/platform for constructive working relationships across our own denominational affiliations."[13] The organisation in fact has two main purposes. The first relates to the aim as given above and is referred to as Church community-building whilst the second revolves around outreach and awareness raising amongst the TBCs in Britain and is identified as bridge-building. In this way it seeks to sustain two ecumenical dialogues, having as its guiding principle in both, the concept of reconciliation between churches and local communities.[14] Joel Edwards took over as General Secretary in 1989 and has since gone on to work with the Evangelical Alliance. During his time with ACEA he worked towards the fulfilment of what he described as "a practical framework to a vision."[15] This involved reuniting a fragmented Church which he regarded as having "little community consciousness over and above those denominational structures."[16] The implicit intention, therefore, was to encourage social mobilisation of the Churches on a collective rather than individual basis. His successor, Ronald Nathan, sought to build upon this foundation by adding to it a framework for collaboration amongst the Churches on a practical economic dimension. Hence a recent initiative of ACEA is the *Agency for the Selection and Support of Individuals Starting Trade (ASSIST)* which provides advice and support to encourage structured business enterprise amongst BLC members.

Whilst the *Accord* and *Highway* celebrations are clearly focused on consciousness raising amongst the membership of BLCs, ACEA attempts to promote ecumenical liberation at pastoral levels also. It has, for example, a

commission known as *Twentieth Centuries Ministries* which works with young ministers and workers within the BLCs in order to encourage their awareness of the "social, spiritual and Biblical issues necessary for a vibrant, effective and relevant ministry in the 21st Century."[17] This is supported by the *Encounters* ministry which is a national forum for discussion. ACEA also has established a theological study group which will be explored in the second section of this chapter.

3. Black Led Churches Liaison Committee (BLCLC)/Council of Black Churches

Four years after the launch of ACEA the Council of Black Led Churches was formed in Birmingham, having as its decision making body the BLCLC. In representing many BLCs in the Birmingham area the Council, through the committee, aims to utilise available resources by drawing together the talent that lies in the BLCs so that a concerted contribution can be made towards the development of local Black communities. As with ACEA the emphasis is on the creation of a community Church: however with the BLCLC there is a more specific objective which relates to the formation of a unified approach in the Church's response to local and national community affairs. As the Chairperson of the Council, Yvonne Mosquito, explained:

> We need to have a more unified approach because being unified you can achieve a whole lot more. People can be forced to listen to what we have to say who are currently not. The Church has always been a very influential mechanism within the African Caribbean community but we have not been using ourselves to do the things that we could have been doing.[18]

Ironically the idea of the committee did not come originally from the Churches themselves but from Birmingham City Council's Race Relations Unit who looked to the Churches in their efforts to forge closer relations with the Black community. In spite of the fact that they still receive funding from the Unit, Mosquito regarded the committee as something which has become autonomous and which, regardless of its beginnings, had been made over in the image and for the service of the Churches. In this role it has identified a range of community issues - the criminal justice system, health, education etc. - which it feels are important for the Churches to begin to grapple with and has set about encouraging them to participate collectively in addressing such issues.

The underlying ethos of this kind of ecumenical alliance is self-help. There are a number of sub groups created by the Church Council which seek to promote a stronger awareness and understanding of the aims on a practical day-to-day basis. As the participating Churches come together they are able to work out a much broader agenda for the addressing of social needs than their own individual churches are able to do. The NTCG is a member of the Committee and Pastor Thompson related the benefits of the collective approach:

> It is important because our voice will be stronger. In other words, I do some things here, another Church does some things there. If you put them together and look at it then you say the Black Church is doing that. But if you picked out one, there is a smaller dimension of meeting needs. I have a supplementary school here but I don't have a home for the elderly. Other Black Churches have a home for the elderly so put those two together and the scope is broader.[19]

The benefits of this are practical and financial as well as ideological. Since the Churches of a local area are able to come together in order to identify specific needs, they can avoid reproducing services within the same area and are, therefore, able to apply a collective and strategic approach to the pursuit of local government and other funding. As well as providing services, the committee can report back on the activities of the Churches so that their collective projects can be seen and recognised within the community. As Pastor Corbett (SPF), another member of the committee, observed this means that "year-by-year people can see that the Churches are not just out there Bible-bashing but really bringing the Bible into the community after the sermon is preached."[20]

In addition to the co-ordination of pre-existing services the committee also seeks to promote a more conscious economic agenda among the Churches. This, it is argued, will provide the key to advances within the social areas they wish to address by giving them access to political leverage. Once again, as Mosquito argues:

> The economic is the most important kind of power because what I am trying to do is to unify us so that we have some kind of economic strength and with this economic strength comes political power. We don't want political power...if we need to use it it will come when we are addressing the issues of education, the criminal justice system etc.; so we can say we don't like that. With economic strength something can be done.[21]

At the forefront of the economic ethos is the move to become ultimately self-financing and to establish both voluntary and paid work forces through which the work of the committee will be carried out. At present the self-reliance ethos is

maintained by the encouragement of members to support Black business enterprise particularly in the area of food. The Church Council, for example, organises the importation of Caribbean foods which they are able to sell at cheaper than shop prices:

> We have to put ourselves in the frame of mind to say that we are not inferior. We've got to buy from our own people. We've got to be more competitive and we've got to start to look after our own because nobody is going to look after our own for us.[22]

BLCLC, unlike ACEA, does not have a particular policy of bridge building between Black and White churches. It argues, rather, that its strategic and ideological priority is for unification first and foremost among the BLC. This, as Mosquito elaborates, is so that the Churches can first get their own "house in order" before they attempt to make contact with other organisations. Clearly one of the most essential aspects of ordering the house involves encouraging the Churches to work together towards an ongoing manifestation of spiritual truths combined with and responding to local social realities. Whilst this should not involve a false theological uniformity amongst the Churches it should, nonetheless lead to a pragmatic liberational partnership. As Pastor Corbett argued:

> What we are saying is that despite the fact that we disagree on various dogmatics of theology we can agree that we have a problem as Black people. We've got to strive four times harder than the White community to make well and to motivate our people and we can do it together as a body.[23]

More recently the Committee has changed its name to the Council of Black

Churches and this has reflected a further shift or broadening of ecumenical emphasis. Its primary focus is now its role as one of nine minority community members of the Standing Consultative Forum, a group which continues to closely liaise with Birmingham Council's Race Relations Unit in order to effect change in issues concerning minority communities in Birmingham. In terms of African Caribbean community concerns, the group focuses on Black mental health, in particular Schizophrenia diagnoses and relapse rates[24], and education issues, particularly Black exclusions. (It is soon to co-host a conference with the African Caribbean People's Movement on Education and the Black Family.) It currently has at least 69 churches affiliated with it and maintains, in addition to this, formal and informal ties with individuals and groups within BLC denominations. In this way all five of the denominations featured in this present study are involved, in some way, in the organisation. Moreover, while its new ecumenical emphasis has seen it become more involved in social and political networks it nonetheless maintains contact with its affiliated churches through the interaction of the ministers and through regular newsletters and reports.

4. United Evangelical Project (UEP)

The United Evangelical Project is based in Aston, Birmingham and was brought together under the leadership of Pastor Corbett, the one time leader of Shiloh Pentecostal Fellowship. Originally entitled Evangelical Youth Project (owing to the fact that it catered for, in particular, the housing needs of young people) it eventually took on the more general title when it found its services being used by a wider group. The project emerged out of the pastoral caring of Pastor

Corbett when he began to identify some very specific needs of the community, both Christian and non-Christian. Aware of the possible hindrance of being associated with one particular denomination, Pastor Corbett established UEP in order to provide what would be considered an impartial, practical service for the local community both inside and outside of the Church.

Like ACEA, the project is organised around a number of individual programmes. The building itself was also one time host to the Evangelical Christians for Racial Justice, (see below), and the United Churches Housing Association, an organisation that was launched in 1991 to provide accommodation for senior Black citizens in Birmingham.[25] Amongst these programmes the youth hostel service continues, providing temporary housing for homeless people before they are moved into housing associations. The project also runs a Biblical counselling course in which secular counselling methods are related to Biblical theology in order to produce a course of both social and spiritual relevance.[26] From those who successfully complete the course, a team is selected to remain in the project and provide a counselling and advice service for the local community. This team is then assisted by a full-time counselling and advice worker. UEP also provides a mental health programme; working with ex-psychiatric patients.

The casual advice work which the centre engaged in has led to a more formal legal advice service: UEP now has its own full-time lawyer and is officially registered as a Christian law centre. The aftermath of the 1980s riots, in particular, increased the need for professional legal advice and UEP were able to provide a welcoming environment and assistance from a source which

related to local community needs. As Pastor Corbett related, the riots also led to another service which sought to address the impact of the many wrongful arrests and prison sentences metered out within the Black community. *Prison Link* was formed with the aim of looking after the families of those who had been imprisoned as well as ministering to those who were undergoing sentences. It has a full-time worker and received initial funding from the Home Office. *Prison Link* has more recently developed two additional services to support their initial work. *The Children's Network* offers a structured and wide ranging programme of recreational and educational activities for the children of prisoners, while *Prison Link Return* aims to provide practical support and counselling for prisoners on their release at the end of their sentences.

All the programmes run at UEP are designed to meet the needs of the local African Caribbean and also Asian communities. In this the project is explicit and unapologetic:

> We are saying to the community, we're Christians, here we are to serve. Christ was very sensitive to cultural backgrounds and we work within that framework[27]

Service to Black communities, however, is intended to meet more than cultural needs. As their publicity material clearly states, it is a direct attempt by the Church to respond to racism and oppression inherent in the structures of society:

> The United Evangelical Project, being a black organisation, also recognises the real extent of prejudice and discrimination. The project is therefore committed to the eradication of such, within the communities in which it may work.[28]

The issue of whether projects like UEP do actually succeed in eradicating the root or only the symptoms of such injustices is a matter which this study will address subsequently in this and the final chapter. It is nonetheless significant that the project is continually growing, initiating new programmes as and when they are recognised as needed by the community. Its staffing structure has remained an example of ecumenical co-operation from a number of BLCs in the main, although it also has volunteer contacts from a wider circle of Churches in the area.

Internal Dialogue: Assessing the Nature of Radicalism

The above three organisations indicate a clear commitment of the BLC to take seriously the ecumenical criterion of liberation. Such a commitment has significant consequences for the overall manifestation of a theology of liberation within the Churches and these become apparent in the following ways.

Firstly, the reality of different denominations coming together for a culturally specific, social, economic and political agenda effectively undermines control of dominant theology's perpetuation of an ideological divide and rule policy. Churches as doctrinally opposed as the SDA and Pentecostal groupings can overcome their mistrust of each other's articulated theologies and recognise their common commitment to a liberational spirituality. Secondly ecumenicalism provides vital physical and mental space for these BLCs to engage in communal critical reflection on liberational praxis. In so doing they are given an opportunity to name themselves and their faith and decide on the paths they should take to develop productively in the future. Thirdly

Churches are able to combine energies, ideas and resources in a practical and collective response to a wide range of community needs.

When considered together the three networks can be said to be catering in key ways for the requirements of liberational theology in that they engage in critical reflection as well as socio-political and economic action. In all three cases the organisations nurture an explicitly Black identity and thereby consciously align themselves with the many causes of the communities they seek to represent. Moreover, the very process of ecumenical action serves to broaden the social analysis of the Churches so that, for example, strategic alliances are made with other oppressed groups and conscientization[29] occurs for their mutual benefit. In this way, as the Church experiences concrete engagement with other contexts, its own liberational process becomes more holistic.

To this extent this interdenominational dialogue of the BLC can be described as engaging at least in some elements of *active radicalism.* According to the previous chapter's exploration of social analysis, it can be identified as having a conscious political identity in that the explicit purpose of coming together is to serve its spiritual obligations by working for the cause of the oppressed. It can also be defined as promoting a multi-dimensional vision of societal transformation since the various projects seek to apply a range of social, economic and political means of overcoming the structural 'sin' of society. Finally, its broadened engagement with social analysis affords it the potential of offering an historical analysis of oppression as it seeks to better understand and

therefore impact on the experiences of those disadvantaged within the communities it serves.

The broader nature of the social analysis expressed in these ecumenical alliances prompts a closer exploration of what kind of liberational activity is required within the British context. For example, in engaging in social action on behalf of the poor, imprisoned, mentally 'ill', educationally disadvantaged, unemployed and ideologically oppressed, the BLC would appear to be involved in radical liberational praxis. However, since many of the existing ministries focus on assisting and even empowering 'victims' rather than opposing the structures which continue to perpetuate their oppression, the networks could, perhaps, be accused of offering no real degree of counter-hegemonic resistance. Hence they simply engage in passive radicalism from an ecumenical standpoint - assisting, this time, the community to *cope with* rather than *alter* systematic oppression.[30] Moreover their close and sometimes financial dependency on statutory organisations and, in particular, local government councils, means that the problematic relationship individual Churches have with dominant theology and White headquarters runs a danger of being repeated in a new form through their larger ecumenical developments.

Although these are concerns which this study addresses at length below, in brief two arguments can be levelled against the general criticism. The first concerns the developing nature of many of these projects which are beginning to create the theoretical structures with which to confront the causes as well as the symptoms of oppression in society.[31] The second relates to the strategic

appropriateness of revolutionary approaches to countering hegemonic control. The question of liberational methodology draws attention to areas of limitation within the internal dialogical relationship of the BLC. Clearly the fact that the Church manifests elements of active radicalism within its own internal ecumenical networks is not to suggest that this radicalism has become an holistic dimension of its dialogical expression. This becomes apparent with a closer exploration of, for example, the first of the networking groups.

ACEA is the largest of the three organisations, having members from across the country in addition to a London base. It has in the region of 1000 individual members and 80 affiliated Churches in addition to the membership of over 200 headquarter Churches. Whilst it clearly embraces the task of critical reflection within the working out of its own theological imperatives, it appears to limit itself in the manifestation of those imperatives to the extent that it does not, as is stated in its Guiding Principles, "attempt to highlight racial distinctives." Since the various programmes of the network are all geared, in some way, to addressing the concerns of African Caribbean Christian faith in Britain, this statement would seem to re-focus attention on the essential problematic of passive radicalism: that is, of theological talk belying spiritual and even social practice.

ACEA has, for example, as will be explored in the following section of this chapter, organised three conferences which focus on the issues of the development of Black Theology in Britain. This work has been centred around the objective of finding "common ground"[32] amongst the various BLCs and indeed Black Christians generally, through which a more powerful and

liberational collective ministry can be forged. Such a process is grounded upon historical analysis which necessarily highlights racial and other distinctives.[33] Therefore in placing such a clause in its Guiding Principles, ACEA would appear to be creating for itself an unnecessary and even counter-productive ambiguity.

In much the same way both the former BLCLC and UEP appeared somewhat hesitant to associate themselves with an explicit socio-political identity although they did acknowledge the political implications of their economic and social ministries. It would appear that this reluctance stems from the Churches' determined allegiance to dominant, fundamentalist theology that encourages a secular/spiritual divide which renders incompatible a proactive approach to structural change in the social world.

In his analysis of the National Conference of Black Churchmen, the American theologian James Cone has observed that "one's Christian identity is defined more by one's commitment to the liberation of the poor than by repeating a confession of faith in Jesus written by Europeans."[34] Gutierrez echoes this view in his important distinction between dominant theology's concern with the *non-believer* and Liberation Theology's concern for the *non-person.*[35] It stands in the interest of the former theology to focus on a narrowly spiritualised concept of individual conversion which, in removing the converted from their social, economic, political and often cultural contexts, protects the interests of those who benefit from the status quo. By such an analysis the BLC networks, arguably, compromise their commitment to liberational activity by their expressed allegiance to 'decontextualised doctrines' and essentially Eurocentric

theological directives. In this way the theme of conflict continues to manifest itself in the ecumenical developments of the BLC, creating a tension between the imperatives of liberational spirituality and the influence of dominant theology. Before moving on to explore the direction of external ecumenicalism within the BLC, there is a further element of dialogue within the internal structures of the Churches which also impact on its degree of radicalism. There are, in effect, three significant challenges which the Churches must confront in order to embrace a holistic and active radicalism in terms of the marginalised within its own structures.

Firstly, the Church needs to enter into a meaningful dialogue with the concerns of women within its networks and within individual denominations and Churches. This means that women must be encouraged to articulate their own social analysis and that men must be encouraged to engage with it so that a liberational praxis can be worked out within the context of the Churches that will subsequently influence action in the community. Since, as Collins has observed, the alternative epistemology of the Churches has most often emanated from a Black and female source,[36] then the broader context of liberation can best be achieved by ensuring that the voices and liberational spirituality of women are heard explicitly and holistically throughout the various levels of theological expression.

This process has been initiated through women such as Elaine Foster and Io Smith. Smith has focused on combining a liberational spirituality (action) with a gender specific theology (critical reflection) in order to ensure that women are

not marginalised in the overall struggle for liberation within the Churches.[37] This has resulted in the Christian Women's Self Help Organisation which aims to meet the holistic needs of women within the Church and community.[38] These specific concerns, however, need to be more thoroughly integrated into both the ecumenical structures and local auxiliary services of the Churches.

A second continuing concern for dialogue within the BLC is the issue of the often but not exclusively young voices of resistance which are heard most frequently in the margins of the Church experience. The previous chapter has illustrated that the prompt for critical reflection within the Churches has often been the need to respond to young people who require a more culturally specific and socially relevant theology. Whilst the rapid development of social ministries in the Churches from the 1980s onwards has been a tangible response to these concerns, the Churches need to maintain an ongoing dialogue with new prophetic voices.

Very often these dissenting voices have received their impetus from socio-religious, cultural developments which have existed outside of the Church. The Rastafarian movement provides a most salient example of such an influence in the formative years of generational Church development in Britain.[39] With increased further and higher educational exposure of young people within the Churches the contemporary influences come from a wider range of sociological and political criticisms of the role of religion in society. However one significant source of cultural and ideological criticism of the Church's complacency with racism is to be found in a new socio-spiritual movement - that of Afrocentricity.[40]

Whatever the source of influence, dissenting voices within the Church still encounter difficult experiences. As Ronald Nathan has commented, "they still find themselves isolated in their congregations as troublemakers and those who are not quite saved."[41] In order to move towards a consistently active radicalism, therefore, the BLC must both accept and encourage expressions of radicalism from the margins of its Church community, and recognise such voices as being a further means of engaging in critical reflection on its own liberational praxis. This would enable it to broaden its scope for liberation.

One final way in which internal dialogue needs to be encouraged in order for holistic and active liberation to take place is through the Churches' own creation of a cultural hegemony within its structures. Following on from the concerns raised by Brooks about a Jamaican monopoly of the Churches' cultural identity, the BLC needs to give thoughtful reflection to this issue to ensure that all African Caribbean and, indeed, other identity groups who are committed to the ethos of holistic theological liberation, can feel themselves a full part of the Church. Although the Church now consists of second, third and even fourth generations of African Caribbeans, the issue of cultural heritage is still a live one[42] and the Church must therefore be careful that it does not mimic the actions of many TBCs by denying members a right to their own cultural contexts.[43]

In order for the dialogical developments of the BLC to fulfil what the Womanist theologian Kelly Brown Douglas has identified as the "social-political analysis of wholeness"[44], it is important that a type of internalised ecumenicalism be brought into being. This will enable the Church to engage in critical reflection on its

liberational praxis and will thereby ensure that it does not cut itself off from the developing liberational concerns of its community. Additionally, it will encourage a consistent meeting of this dialogical criterion for liberation at popular, pastoral and professional levels of expression.

External Dialogue and Ecumenicalism

In addition to the networks and the requirements of dialogue which exist internally within the BLC, there is a further need for links with external bodies in order to meet this general criterion for liberation. The Ghanaian theologian Mercy Oduyoye has, for example within her own context, pointed to the crucial imperative of dialogue not only with the victims of oppression but also with those activists who are committed to overcoming it.[45] Within the British context, this means that the Church would need to extend its internalised ecumenical programme to those, existing within the wider churched and non-churched community, who also seek to respond to the oppression experienced by Black communities.

1. External Dialogue with Traditional British Churches

One obvious place for such alliances to begin is with those Black Christian members of Traditional British Churches who face their own battles for liberation both within their Churches and in the wider community.[46] The division of the ACC experience in Britain into the TBCs and BLCs has inevitably led to the creation of a number of barriers between Christians within the two traditions. The BLC's perception of incorrect and inadequate doctrine on the part of the TBCs has sometimes produced a kind of suspicion of Black Christians within

those denominations. Similarly, the intellectual contempt that TBCs have sometimes had for what is perceived as the dependency on emotionalism in the BLCs has influenced the attitudes of Black TBC Christians towards the BLC. Since these divisions are nurtured, in the main, by the concerns of dominant theologies and epistemologies, there exists a clear need for dialogue between the two groups in order for the negative implications of division to be overcome. However with the exception of one significant development,[47] such links have generally emerged, if at all, on the peripheries of larger networking organisations which attempt to promote a more general dialogue between Black and White led Churches. For example, the *Directory of Organisations Tackling Issues of Racism Through the Churches in Britain*, lists a total of eighteen regional organisations which have an ecumenical emphasis on overcoming racial injustice yet none of them are uniquely focused on building networks between Black Christians in White and Black Churches.[48] The nurturing of Black solidarity through dialogue, therefore, is not prioritised amongst these networking organisations - most of whom were initiated by White commissions within the TBC. Black Christians of both Black and White traditions have, still been able to utilise these fora in order to make some small and tentative moves towards dialogue.[49] This is illustrated in the case of two Birmingham based organisations.

Evangelical Christians for Racial Justice (ECRJ)

The Evangelical Christians for Racial Justice organisation which was started in 1972 with the name of the Evangelical Race Relations Group, emerged as a

largely White, male, Anglican enterprise. It now has an executive committee which is more representative of the Black community and had, until recently, a development worker who was a member of a BLC. Having been without a field worker for several years, it recently appointed an Education worker who is also from the BLC.

ECRJs manifesto for the 1990s includes a determination to combat racism in theology, in the Churches and in society. In practice this is attempted through a number of small scale projects: conferences and seminars, publications of newsletters, booklets and academic papers. The most notable example of its publications being the quarterly journal, *Racial Justice* and the two compilations of the experiences of Black Christians in Britain, *A Time to Speak* and its follow up, *A Time to Act.*[50] These last two publications contain contributions from at least three members of BLCs.

Whilst there has been an increase in Black representation amongst the executive and staff of ECRJ, the direct links with BLCs have remained tenuous. Nonetheless the organisation has provided the framework from which a dialogue between Black Christians has begun to take place. The above-named publications have been a significant part of that, representing the critical reflections of African, African Caribbean and Asian Christians from Black and White led denominations. A further dialogical link has been initiated by the work of the organisation's former development worker, Clarice Nelson, in the form of a Black Christian Women's group which is still very much in its formative stages. Meetings are attended by Black women of churches ranging from Roman

Catholic to Pentecostal who aim to explore Womanist paradigms for liberation that will impact on the lives of both men and women in Churches and in society.[51]

Centre For Black and White Christian Partnership (CBWCP)

The second organisation through which advances in Black dialogue has been made was launched in the late seventies through interested parties of both Black and White churches. As the Church directory observes, it emerged "when churches began to realise (on the side of White majority) and to expect (on the side of Black majority) that the rise of many new churches (because of the introduction of Black Christianity in Britain) had to be taken seriously."[52] Reflecting their bridge building ethos, the executive and staff membership is representative of a wide range of traditions from Anglican to African and inclusive of the BLC. The objectives of the centre are divided into four main areas. These are: education (it offers various courses leading to a Certificate in Theology awarded by Birmingham University), inter Church relations, information resources and international links. Within each of these areas the emphasis is placed on "mutual respect and partnership"[53] and a sharing of different theological and cultural experiences.

Since it is the role of the centre to provide a forum in which inter-church relations can be nurtured, the potential does at least exist for Black Christians of Black and White Church backgrounds to develop stronger relations. For example, the certificate in theology course takes place over a series of weekends and is structured around seminars and worship sessions which are held at Churches

throughout the Birmingham area. The course provides a good foundation for better understanding of the historical and theological traditions of the churches and includes reflections on the needs and contemporary requirements of liberation. This is reinforced by the contextual worship which is guided by the host church. The course has, in fact, featured a seminar on the need for a Black theology of liberation in Britain which will be explored at length in the second section of this chapter.

In spite of these coincidental connections, the BLC has no structured or official policy commitment to move towards dialogue with other Black Christians. Moreover, the limitations of dialogue are exacerbated by the general mistrust that many Churches still have towards White Christians in the TBCs. As one pastor declared, "I would not go into a White led church unless I was working in there. They are dead and forgotten...These people are not converted."[54] The steps being made by organisations such as ECRJ and CBWCP, therefore, have not completely removed a deep-seated memory of past injustices. Hence, with some of the Churches at least, the limitations of dialogue with the TBCs are inter-linked with a social and historical analysis which is critical of the racism of the past and suspicious of the current motivation for alliance:

> When we came here first it was a White pastor helped to fill up our church because when the Black person went to their church they were so critical of them that they hastened to tell them where we were. When they found out that progression was on our side, they changed their attitude and became more flexible to our people... I don't think the Lord would call me as a Black person to give me a White head, we wouldn't want anything like that.[55]

These sentiments were echoed in the responses of a significant number of BLC members[56] and it is this fundamental level of mistrust which then serves to limit the degree of liberational dialogue with Black Christians. ACEA, with its policy of bridge-building between White and Black churches is perhaps the only exception to this pattern. Yet even here, the emphasis is on a general dialogue with White churches and carries no specific focus on the Black Christians within them. With an absence of structured ecumenical solidarity with such a vital candidate for partnership, the liberational praxis of the Church, as far as the issue of dialogue is concerned, is significantly undermined.

In terms of the earlier discussion on the contextual nature of ecumenicalism it can, with some justification, be argued that the Churches' lack of progress in dialogical developments with the TBCs is a pragmatic prioritising of liberational requirements, much in the same way that EATWOT has created its own boundaries for ecumenicalism. However this argument is undermined on two counts. Firstly, in view of the fact that in failing to respond to what they have understood as the racism of these churches, they have reneged on the prophetic obligation of liberative ecumenicalism. There is therefore no unified and explicit, critical voice of the BLC calling the TBC to social and spiritual repentance. Secondly, in that in failing to explicitly align themselves with Black Christians within these Churches they have missed out on a significant opportunity for ecumenical priesthood and reconciliation. Moreover they have also failed to draw sufficiently on the experiences of these Christians in order to broaden their own social analysis and critical reflection. This has necessarily

affected the nature of their engagement with theological liberation.

2. External Dialogue with the Black Community

As has thus far been examined, the liberational imperative of dialogue means that the BLC needs to form meaningful alliances with those groups through which it can both broaden and strengthen its own liberational praxis. This includes nurturing its internal sense of unity, making pragmatic contact with TBCs and, particularly, reinforcing its bonds with Black Christians from these denominations, who are equally exposed to the inequalities and injustices of the wider society. If the Church is to fulfil this holistically ecumenical approach this means that, in addition to the above considerations, it needs to engage in dialogue in another significant area. It can not afford to ignore the need for dialogue with those voices within the unchurched Black community who are not simply victims of injustice and racism but proactive ideologues in the struggle to overcome it. Within the recent history and contemporary existence of the Church there would appear to be two significant ideological movements which have emerged within Black communities in Britain with which the Church would need to engage.[57] What follows below is an attempt to place the movements briefly, within their British context in order to explore what points of contact, if any, exists between the BLC and them.

Rastafarianism and Afrocentricity

The Rastafarian religion in Britain emerged as a religio-political development amongst second and third generation African Caribbeans, mainly in the late 1960s and 1970s. Its ideological origin can be traced back to the influence of

the Jamaican cultural nationalist, Marcus Garvey and it stands in that island as a significant twentieth century example of spiritual engagement with counter-culture and socio-political resistance.[58]

As Winston James has observed, Rastafarianism represents not so much one centralised movement as a wide ranging collection of ideologies.[59] It has, nonetheless, generally been regarded as a single socio-religious ideology and this idea has been reinforced by the negative coverage it has had from the British media supported initially by official police operations.[60] Its reputation as an anti-establishment philosophy of rebellion has been welcomed by social scientists such as Stuart Hall who regard the 'movement' as being one of the earliest significant demonstrations of Black youth resistance in Britain.[61] although, as Cashmore[62] has explored, this general reputation has been somewhat usurped by a wider and less defined constituent of Black youth, the essential identity of Rastafarianism as a religious movement questioning the social and political status quo has not been diminished. It is, primarily this element of identity that intersects with the BLC in its pursuit of a liberational theology.

Afrocentricity

Afrocentricity within Britain emerges out of an African American context and is closely associated with the philosophies of Black Nationalism[63] and the revival of neo-African spiritual movements and identities.[64] In the first element, it shares in common a foundational heritage with Rastafarianism. It attempts to offer an holistic response to what it understands as the alienation and oppression of the

African personhood[65] within the context of a world saturated with Eurocentric lifestyles, value systems and exploitative and essentially corrupt spiritual, social, economic and political systems. In its American context it has most readily been associated with the development of Black Studies programmes led by academics such as Dr. Maulana Karenga, Dr. Leonard Jeoffries, and Molefi Kete Asante, and the increase of academic texts on historical themes in African development, in particular those which explore Africa as the foundation of world civilizations.[66]

In Britain the philosophy of Afrocentricity as a culturally specific tool of resistance and Black affirmation has been presented and nurtured through a range of academic conferences, seminar programmes and popular study courses.[67] Its presence in the U.K. has paralleled the development of a more general popular Black consciousness movement which has also been widely influenced by Black American popular culture.[68] Much of its popularity amongst, in particular, young Black people in Britain can be found in its ideological emphasis on African cultural worldviews as the source of holistic regeneration of Black people and as an essential counterbalancing entity for Eurocentric worldviews. Once again, as in Rastafarianism, it is this formalised association with Blackness which responds to those second, third and fourth generations of Africans and African Caribbeans who seek to challenge the Western hegemonic manipulation of ways of knowing. Afrocentricity offers, therefore, a two stranded approach. As Karenga writes:

> the critical thrust is the advancing of severe and ongoing criticism of the established order of things in

> order to negate myths, mystifications and insubstantialities of traditional white studies on Blacks, society and the world. And the corrective thrust is the correlative discovery and affirmation of the truth of the Black experience in its current and historical unfolding.[69]

Afrocentric thought finds a theological meeting point in the works of theologians such as James Cone in that it is precisely this centring on the contextual Black narrative that informs the epistemological imperatives of its analysis.[70] Within the specific arena of Biblical studies it has manifested itself in a recuperative approach which attempts to locate Blackness within the Bible. This work has been championed, in particular, by the Rev. Walter McCray[71] who made his first tour of Britain in 1994. It is through such study tours and an increasing availability of literature, tapes and study groups, that the ideologies of Afrocentricity - Christian and non Christian based - are beginning to impact on Black Christian communities in Britain.

Points of Intersection and Dialogue

As movements making a consciously articulated and contextual response to the experience of oppression in British society, Afrocentricity and Rastafarianism hold several significant ideological implications for liberation within the BLC. There emerge, therefore several distinct points of connection.

Firstly there exists a tangible historical relationship between the two ideological systems and the Church. The previous chapter has already identified a link between African centred epistemologies and the social analysis of the BLC, this relationship is expanded upon in the work of the Womanist theologian Cheryl

Townsend Gilkes in her essay on the 'Afrocentric Idea.'[72] Gilkes argues that the reality of Afrocentric strategy in the history of the Black Church in America actually predates the coinage and current use of the term. This study will assert that much the same argument can be made for the British BLC and draws upon the "eight essential elements" cited by Ekwe-Ekwe and Nzegwu[73] to illustrate this assertion.

In their study on 'Operationalising Afrocentrism' they argue that there are eight central characteristic traits which have manifested themselves in the structures and societies of a diverse range of African and African descended peoples. These are as follows: 1. *The Family* as a vital reference point for identity; 2. *Brother's/Sister's Keeper*, indicating an emphasis on mutual care and responsibility; 3. *Wholesome Human Relations among Peoples* to indicate an organisational emphasis on an "altruistic and community ethic"; 4. *Communal Land Tenure and Ownership*, representing the open access to land; 5. *Live and Let Live*, an emphasis on coexistence rather than separation and division; 6. *Respect for Elders and the Old;* 7. *Generosity/Hospitality* particularly in terms of the visitor and stranger and 8. *African Optimism*, identifying a "peaceable disposition to life's mission."

The identification of these traits are not without their problems.[74] Nevertheless, they present a useful means of highlighting the way in which the BLC in Britain can be said to have nurtured an Afrocentric perspective at the heart of its own liberational development. For example the listed traits 1-3 are very much

encapsulated in the characteristic of *community* which this study has previously identified. The Church therefore has had an ongoing commitment to the ethos of mutual care and responsibility. The sixth element, *Respect for Elders and the Old,* has clearly been manifested in the work of the BLC. It exists not only in the Church's organisational structures (the reverential position given to 'elders', 'mothers' etc. of the Church) but also in the practical way in which the Churches have, through their housing projects and day care centres, targeted the needs of the elderly in their social programmes. The issue of Communal land tenure is combined with the seventh trait concerning generosity and hospitality in the sense that the Church has traditionally opened up its spaces to the community. This has, in the last decade, become more systematic in terms of the organised social programmes of the Churches; however, the idea of "hospitality to the 'stranger', the 'visitor', the foreigner" has been an explicit and consistent feature in the lives of the Churches. Ironically it can be argued that it is this need to accommodate the 'other' in terms of dominant theology that has contributed to the BLC's reluctance to make a consistently explicit alignment with a Black and liberational theology.

The fifth identified trait of *live and let live* is slightly more difficult to translate within the context of the BLC. Certainly the concept of coexistence and connectedness contributes to the nature of social analysis within the Churches. However it is significantly compromised by its commitment to a dominant fundamentalism which encourages a rigid separation between believer and non-believer, Christian and non-Christian and sacred and secular worlds.[75]

Nonetheless the final trait of *African Optimism* is clearly present within the Church. In its syncretised form it becomes manifest through what Cone has called the "art of survival" combined with an eschatology which is part and parcel of the Church's own liberative spiritual expression.

Rastafarianism in Britain also has a closer connection with the BLCs than would first, perhaps, be suspected. Not only is the theology of the faith inspired from a Biblical (predominantly Old Testament source) but also its emergence in Britain has been at least partly attributed to the disillusionment of Black youth from inside the Church.[76] Hence, as the critical reflections of Church pastors have revealed, the movement has served as a constant challenge to the nature of theological development and social awareness within the Churches. Since both Afrocentricity as a multi-manifested ideology and Rastafarianism as a politico-religious movement both have points of reference which connect them to the BLC, the need for a dialogical relationship becomes apparent.

A second reason which justifies dialogue between the three movements is the way in which Afrocentricity and Rastafarianism can serve to broaden the Church's understanding and practice of liberation. This is achieved in at least two key ways, both of which relate to the social analysis of the Church at pastoral and popular levels. Firstly, both movements offer a strong historical analysis which, as the previous chapter has explored, is not always existent within the Church. Rastafarianism for example "successfully linked Christianity... with the vast system of European imperialism that had reigned for the past three or four centuries. [It] did not spring up fully-formed and imprint itself on people's

minds... It was interpreted in such a way as to act as a convenience for Whites..."[77] Moreover it identifies, very significantly, the impact of internalised oppression, as is immortalised in the words of Bob Marley's *Redemption Song*, and calls for a collective Black response to redressing the consequences of it.[78] This response is what Molefi Asante has referred to as the "collective conscious will."[79] It reflects the heart of Afrocentric awareness and itself makes a plea for Black people to commit themselves to a liberational process that begins with their awareness of and attitude towards their ontological Blackness. The main historical analytical thrust of Afrocentricity is the holistic critique of Eurocentric epistemology in particular as it relates to Black history and contemporary being. Secondly, the ideologies of Afrocentricity and Rastafarianism offer an unapologetic and explicit alignment with the cause of Black oppression and liberation[80] and in so doing they create a clear and uncompromised counter-culture.

In spite of what appear to be useful points of contact between the three movements, the BLC has had minimum formalised dialogue with the representatives of those developments in Britain. This does not, however mean that a less formalised contact has not been maintained. The previous chapter, for example, has demonstrated how some pastoral reflections of the 1980s sought to respond to the critique of social and cultural irrelevancy put forward by Rastafarianism and those within the Church who had been influenced by its ideological centring. In the 1990s explicit and unapologetic Afrocentric programmes have superseded Rastafarianism as a significant influence

amongst many young people within the Church. Many of these young Christians are developing links with non-Christian cultural, educational and political programmes organised around the concept of holistic, Af

amongst many young people within the Church. Many of these young Christians are developing links with non-Christian cultural, educational and political programmes organised around the concept of holistic, Afrocentric development through community action.[81] Unlike many of their parent and grandparent generations within the BLC, they do not feel the need to isolate or protect themselves from what once would have been considered the radical elements in their communities. Neither, however do they feel a need to surrender their spiritual foundations in order to facilitate the demands of this cultural development. The process is therefore a symbiotic one for these individuals who are motivated by spiritual convictions to involve themselves more closely with work for change within their own communities whilst at the same time developing their own selves through ideologies and educational concepts to which the Church had not previously provided them access.

Like the Rastafarian movement before it, for some young people, the move into Afrocentric awareness has necessitated a reluctant separation from their Churches as they struggle to come to terms with a wealth of information which in some cases appears to conflict with traditional Church teaching. With others, however, their new awareness has inspired them not only to become more deeply involved in external movements and organisations, but also to take the essence of these programmes back into their Churches in order to stimulate the development of a more explicitly cultural and political institution. The outcome of this last process is evidenced in the springing up of courses, seminars and conferences such as that by Walter McCray.[82]

Afrocentricity and Rastafarianism, of course, represent only two examples of voices from the community through which the Church may be able to enlarge its understanding and response to Black oppression.[83] Moreover additional dialogical demands are presented by a 'transcontextual'[84] understanding of oppression both within British society and internationally. Whilst, for example, many of the Churches have missionary or church-building connections with Africa, there is little evidence to suggest that the relationship extends to an engagement with the African theological struggles for liberation. What becomes clear is that there exists a new need for pastoral and popular responses to the neo-consciousness of the 1990s and this can best be achieved by establishing dialogue with significant voices within local, national and even international communities. Such ecumenical connections need not be uncritical since, as has already been explored, the ideologies represented in Afrocentric and other approaches are not without their problems.[85] However neither should they be so sceptical that no meaningful point of contact can be made.

F. Liberation Manifested as Popular, Pastoral and Professional Theology.

The final criterion for a theology of liberation provides something of a summary of each of the other five in that it argues for a consistent reflection of them at all three levels of development: pastoral, popular and professional. This study has primarily been concerned with the first two of those levels; however since, as Boff and Boff have argued, they need to be as closely related as the branch, roots and trunk of a tree,[86] it will be important finally to consider the

developments which have been made in the area of Liberation Theology within the BLC at the professional level.

Professional levels of Liberation

According to Boff and Boff the professional level of liberation should be engaged with "detailed and rigorous" discourse. It is at this level that the expectation lies for a structured and systematic social analysis, for theologians and educators to be linked to theological seminaries which are concerned with the production of conference papers and published reflections. The laying out of a theoretical framework for contextual liberation should be made at this level. This should then be transposed, explored and implemented at the other two levels, even as the pastoral and popular practices are communicated back in order to inform the theory of the professionals.

There are several key developments which have occurred over the past five years in Britain which have begun the process of carrying out such tasks and these will now be explored.

1. Black British Theology in Conference

One significant development of recent years has been the organising of a number of seminars and conferences which have provided a forum for the exploration of the relevance of Black Theology for Britain. Three of these have been ACEA (and therefore BLC initiatives) whilst one has been part of the CBWCP certificate programme and yet another has emerged from the work of Queens College (see below). The conferences have been significant in several ways. They have encouraged a growing ecumenicalism amongst Black

Christians of varying denominations and they have begun to articulate both the fears and the aspirations of the Churches as they begin to make explicit and vocalised alliances with a contextual theology.

David Muir of a NTCG church in London has spoken at three of the conferences. His contributions, therefore, are useful in illustrating at least one significant direction of liberative theological development in Britain. The ACEA conference of 1992 was entitled *Black Theology: Does it Embrace Us?* Muir's talk sought to respond to this central query by providing an historical overview of Black liberational development within an American context and relating this to his own experience of conscientization through his encounter with the works of Cone. ACEA's more recent conference in 1996, *British Black Perspectives on Theology,* saw a more focused reflection of British theological developments by a panel of contributors. A comparison of the two fora reveals the patterns which are beginning to establish themselves within the professional engagement with Black contextual theology in Britain. They also demonstrate significant developmental changes.

Firstly both conferences articulated an existing level of mistrust with which an explicitly manifested contextual theology was still regarded within the BLC and amongst Black Christians generally. However, the very titles of the fora indicate a shift, in the space of time between the two conferences, in the general exposure to and familiarity with the concept of a Black Theology. This was indicated by the nature of the debate. The second conference was less introductory and more developmental in terms of its use of concepts and

language. There was a wider inclusion of pastoral, popular and professional responses to Black Theology in Britain and this was reflected in the workshops and discussions by a greater degree of involvement and debate from the diverse participants. Hence although the oral evidence from various contributors would seem to suggest that the mainstream of the Churches are still resistant to a move from passive to active radicalism, this was not necessarily the case. In fact their own presence at the conference, in addition to the support given by pastors and lay leaders, does at least indicate a slowly increasing willingness to expose themselves to the key issues with which such a theology is concerned.

Secondly, both conferences take on an essential prophetic role with regards to the Church's development of contextual theology in Britain. Muir's first paper clearly identifies the imperatives of contextual faith and calls on Black Christians to:

1. Unite: build a sense of community
2. Recognise their liberative heritage
3. Define their own goals
4. Lead and support their own organisations
5. Reject the racist institutions and values of their society.[87]

In true prophetic style, Muir draws from Biblical texts to support his call for liberational revival amongst Black Christians in Britain and argues that there is a Biblical precedent for believing that it is often "through conflict...through confrontation [that] we sometimes get progress." This theme was taken up by the most recent conference, most specifically by the pastoral response of Winston Bygrave. Bygrave identified four principles for the BLC to abide by. The

first two continued in this prophetic role and related the need for Black Christians (1) to take seriously the practical, political and social consequences of a costly discipleship and (2) to make an explicit declaration of the connection between oppression and sin and the Biblical imperative to resist it. His third and fourth principles, however, introduced the contemplative or priestly elements of British liberational theology. They began to speak of the objective of reconciliation as part of the endgame of liberation and reminded believers of the importance of staying within the uniqueness and power of the cross. This priestly element of theological development is significant since, as Boff and Boff have argued," faith cannot be reduced to action however liberating it may be. It is "always greater" and must include moments of contemplation and of profound thanksgiving."[88] This was also recognised by Muir when he made the important distinction of his journey into Black Theology disturbing his "Christian conscience" but not his "Christian peace."[89] Contextual theological liberation at all three levels, therefore, has been able to combine the roles of Prophet and Priest and thereby maintain an important potential for encouraging liberative activity without alienating the believers who need to be part of the conscientization process.

Thirdly, the conferences have taken seriously the need to engage in historical analysis and this has involved an important recognition of the long-standing involvement of the Church in liberational struggles. Muir's initial talk, for example, asserts that "Black theology is radically related to Black history". From this foundation he urges Black Christians, at both pastoral and popular levels, to begin to engage in a critical reflection of their own contextual narrative. Such

a reflection, he argues, will begin to demonstrate to them the realities of their liberational tradition in the midst of the impositions of a dominant theology which has been firmly aligned with wider exploitative and ideological oppressive processes. Muir's own historical analysis has tended to focus on the American experience; however the later forum redressed this by drawing particularly from the Caribbean and African experiences of slavery, imperialism and colonialism and the contextual theological responses which have emerged from within them. Robert Beckford's paper, in particular, focused on the contemporary theological responses being made by Black Christians in Britain. Similarly, Emanuel Lartey's paper outlined the impositions of European systems of dominant theology on the concerns of British Black Christians.

A significant omission from both conferences was a serious engagement with the concerns of Womanist Theology in Britain or even the presentation of more general contextual issues by women theologians. The later conference did include a workshop on British Black perspectives on pastoral studies, which was led by the Rev. Sonia Hicks, and the convenor of the first section of the conference was Kate Coleman, the first Black woman to be ordained in the British Baptist Church. However no main papers were presented by women theologians or pastors. Ironically this most recent conference was co-ordinated by ACEA's Yvonne Hall, who also holds the Chair of the Theological Study Group Steering Committee. The absence of women from the conference rostrum, therefore, is not a reflection of women's involvement in and commitment to contextual theological developments in Britain. It may, however,

reflect the differing approaches that men and women have taken in these developments. It is very often the case that women have organised, planned and participated in grass roots community developments[90] whilst men have been represented in the academic theological institutions and have therefore been given more ready opportunity to articulate themselves and their theologies. The area is largely unexplored and there is a significant need to examine the issue further.[91]

2. Two Key Papers

As a supplement to the forum of the conference or seminar, professional reflections on liberational theology in Britain are also being documented as articles in theological journals. ECRJ's *Racial Justice* has, for example, featured the key note talks of two theologians - Robert Beckford, tutor in Black Theology at Queens College, Birmingham and Ronald Nathan, the one time General Secretary of ACEA - delivered at two consecutive Annual General Meetings of the ECRJ organisation.

Ronald Nathan's lecture, entitled *"Evangelicals - Good News in Black and White?"*, focused on the obligations of those who called themselves Evangelical Christians to live up to the responsibilities and challenges of the holistic good news of Christ. Speaking to a mixed audience of Black and White Christians from a variety of Church backgrounds, his message centred on the principle of liberational ecumenicalism. It is significant in that it also serves to better define ACEA's own bridge-building policy. The principle significance of Nathan's message is twofold. Firstly he offers a critique of the assumptions of

partnership between Black and White. He identifies, for example, the tendency for White Evangelicals involved in such partnerships to seek to define both the problems and the solutions of oppression on behalf of Black Christians. Secondly, and most significantly, he extends the prophetic ministry of Muir, Beckford and others in that he calls attention to the need for a radical Black ecumenicalism in order to "break out of perpetuating the strategy of divide and rule that splits African and West Indian, Koyou and Hibal, Small Island against Big Island, high colour with long straight hair against Black with kinky hair."[92] In addressing the need for internal unity and self love amongst Black people in Britain, Nathan stands within an essentially Afrocentric tradition which, as has been explored, closely relates to Rastafarian counter-hegemonic ideologies. In his assertion that this partnership needs to extend beyond the national frontier, out to those also struggling for justice (in, for example, Africa) Nathan points to the possibility for a significant development in liberational theology in the Churches - one which could lead to the kind of transcontextual liberation called for by Pan-African philosophies. Yet for Nathan, the developing ecumenical partnership amongst the Churches must not simply develop ideologies of liberation; they must also be of social and political significance here in Britain. In particular he warns against the dangers of these partnerships being used by governmental authorities as "appeasers of flared tempers."[93] This has particular significance in the light of the various government aided Church commissions that developed after the riots of the 1980s.

Robert Beckford's presentation, *Spirituality and Liberation: Independent*

Intervention By the Rivers of Babylon, is equally important in an analysis of professional developments in the liberational theology of the BLC. This is so particularly since he draws on the language and symbolism of popular Black resistance, both in the Church and in the community, in order to elucidate the requirements for systematic liberation in Britain. In terms of the Church, he explores the concept of *spirituality* rather than theology and thereby makes a significant acknowledgement of the mechanism through which the Church has engaged in liberation: namely liberational spirituality. In terms of unchurched popular Black resistance, he uses the work of the Jamaican dub poet, Linton Kwesi Johnson, to illustrate how "the mobilisation of culture and collective memory is central to the struggle for justice."[94] From Johnson, Beckford comes to understand the importance of self-directed, cultural liberation as a means of ensuring the consistency and expansiveness of the liberative process. He uses Psalm 137, *By the Rivers of Babylon*, to further draw out the meaning of liberation for Black people in Britain. His conclusions are threefold: (1) liberation necessitates an "unwillingness to participate in and validate one's own oppression;" (2) "resistance takes the form of remembering the past in order to understand the present;" (3) resistance must be directed to the achievement of a particular objective.[95]

Beckford's analysis, like that of Nathan, makes an important contribution to the direction of Liberation Theology in Britain at the professional level. Both theologians engage in constructive critical reflection on the liberational praxis of the BLC. In so doing they not only draw on liberation paradigms from around the

world, but also seek to use those local paradigms gleaned from a process of contextual historical analysis. Both men feel it is important to utilise Afrocentric hermeneutical and epistemological approaches to liberation. Beckford, however is wary of the danger of essentialising Blackness and argues that a cultural foundation to liberation is "not simply a return to all things African: it is also about taking seriously the intersection with European culture."[96]

3. Seminaries and Departments

A third context in which a professional level of Liberation Theology is being developed is in certain key U.K. academic institutions. Despite the fact that no independent school or department of Black Theology yet exists, there have been several important developments over the past decade.

Queens College, Birmingham

One such development was the appointment of Robert Beckford as tutor in Black Theology at the Queen's theological college in Birmingham in 1993. The college ran a Black Christian Studies course before Beckford's appointment. Subsequently, this has been expanded and developed so that Queens now has a regular and structured programme of Black Theology which includes an Access course in Black Theology and Religious Studies. It also nurtures national and international theological links and regularly hosts seminars and other fora through which current developments in Liberation Theology are able to be created, debated, analysed and implemented. A particularly significant element of the programme is the annual study tour which the college organises with prominent international theologians. This has included, for example, the

Caribbean theologian Lewin Williams and from America the Womanist theologian Jacqueline Grant, the Biblical Studies Scholar Randall Bailey and, most recently for the first time in his theological career, the pioneering theologian James Cone. The fora thus created are an important source of dialogue and information sharing for both visitors and British host communities. They thereby make a significant contribution to the nurturing of liberational activity and awareness amongst those who attend both from the Churches *and* the wider Black community.

The University of Birmingham

Birmingham University is worthy of note as a facilitator of the development of a professional level of Liberation Theology since its theology department has been responsible for the supervision of several important theses in this area. The work of Elaine Foster and Carol Tomlin have already been mentioned as have the broader contributions of Roswith Gerloff and Iain Macrobert. The department is also the academic base for a number of significant works in progress, including that of Robert Beckford and Kate Coleman. Coleman's work will be of particular interest since it attempts to explore the relevance of Womanist Theologies to the Black British Christian experience (albeit that she focuses on women within the TBCs).

The Black Theology in Britain Study Group

Perhaps the most significant development in professional level theological expression came into being two years ago in the form of a Black theological study group based in Birmingham (but since extended to London). Founded by

a collective of Black theologians working in the Birmingham area, the forum developed principally as a support group particularly for those theologians who found themselves and their work often alienated by the White institutions in which they worked. With its focus on Black theological concerns, the group is the first of its kind in Britain and it has rapidly established itself as a focal point for discussion and analysis on theological issues pertaining to oppressed communities. Its ecumenical emphasis, in fact, extends not only to the increasingly diverse range of denominational backgrounds represented by the pastors, theologians and academics who make up its membership, but also to an international field represented by Caribbean, African, Asian and even New Zealand liberational contexts. From its original discursive and supportive base, the group has recently established key commission areas which seek to focus on specific tasks and concerns which have been identified as important in the consolidation of contextual theology in Britain. These include a process of research and documentation, a focus on the concerns of women and youth and an extension of participatory research.

Root, Trunk and Branch Theology: Functioning Liberation and the Church

Liberation Theology is manifested at popular, pastoral and professional levels within the BLC in Britain. However, two concerns still require clarification. The first relates to what the *nature* of that liberation is whilst the second seeks to determine what relationship exists between the three levels of theological expression.

According to the analysis of Boff and Boff, the roots of liberational theology can

be located at the popular level of church life through the oral and sacramental expression of the church.[97] This means that the church which engages in theological liberation will manifest liberation in the day-to-day, week-by-week interaction of church members with each other and with society. Moreover, being at the root, it will hold within it the foundation or mould of liberation that will influence the nature of liberation at all three levels.

Thus far this study has argued that, in the context of the BLC, the theological building blocks - the sacraments of liberation - can be found in the manifestation of liberational spirituality. Previous chapters have identified the principle characteristics of this spirituality: the nurturing of identity, community, personal development and encouragement, the involved and holistic worship and the African-centred epistemology. These represent the core methodology of liberation for the BLC, as the Caribbean theologian Kortright Davis has argued:

> Caribbean spirituality is indeed a spirituality of freedom. There is a constant reaching out in prayer and praise to the sovereign free God, and there is a relentless yearning for the empowering sense of a relational presence that is liberating, emancipatory and affirming.[98]

Hence, to paraphrase Gutierrez, spirituality as liberational methodology in the BLC proves to be, at a popular level, the well from which the Black Christian drinks.[99] It is expressed weekly in the communal liturgy and worship and applied daily in the moment-by-moment intersection of the believer with the world. It is from this basis that this study has also sought to demonstrate that popular liberational methodology has emerged out of an African-centred

heritage which continually and contextually interrelates with European and American social, economic, political and ideological forces.

As an ongoing syncretistic process, however, this liberation is also liable to be influenced by the themes of continuity and conflict, innovation and conservatism, which have been identified as symptomatic of religious syncretism. In recognition of this reality, the terms *passive* and *active radicalism* have been used to describe the Church's relationship with theological liberation. This means that although, at a popular level, the Church manifests a foundational liberational undercurrent, it is also apparent that it creates its own continuum of variation, influenced by a number of factors, which determine whether that liberation takes a passive or active form.

One of the most significant factors determining the radical direction of spirituality in the BLC is indeed the kind of pastoral guidance which members receive. Hence the relationship between the three levels of theological manifestation is crucial in shaping the overall placing of liberational spirituality on the continuum of variation. Pastoral theology represents for Boff and Boff the trunk of liberation. It is at this level that the leadership of the Church is able to implement those structures and encourage those ideologies that will serve to maximise the potential of liberational spirituality to effect change in the lives of individuals and communities. It is also here that the processes of critical praxis can be consolidated since it is the leaders of the Church who have the means of mobilising liberational spirituality into actively radical directions. Many of the BLC's current pastors and leaders are still first generation migrants who, whilst

having responded positively to the demands for liberational development within their Churches, have nonetheless been unable to utilise the same tools of critical social analysis that are currently at the disposal of younger generations. Consequently certain gaps remain within the manifestation of liberation within the Churches which prevent an holistic and actively radical approach.

There appears to be no explicitly articulated hermeneutics which would bridge the gap between the new community initiatives of the Churches and their official theological standing. The result of this is that these often significant social, political and economic developments *can appear incidental* to the main business of 'theology'. This was illustrated by, for example, the fact that during the interview process, many lay members of the Churches were not fully aware of some of the initiatives their own institutions had made. Furthermore, since the social analysis of the Churches omits any serious historical analysis of their liberational contexts, many of their social programmes fall open to criticism from those who argue that their measures are more counter-productive than counter-hegemonic.[100]

It remains to be seen whether the new generation of pastors and leaders from within the Churches will be able to make good any of these deficiencies. However what becomes clear is that if they are to do so, then they will need the support of the third level of theological development to be able to critically reflect on their own positions. The current developments emerging within professional Liberation Theology in Britain has the potential to address some of these concerns and thereby to influence the nature and degree of radicalism within the

Churches. The context of such a move must be one of mutual exchange between all three theological levels.

To extend Boff and Boff's metaphor: Liberation Theology in Britain has developed from the roots upwards in that its grounding has been a liberational spirituality nurtured and implemented by the people. From this beginning, pastoral critical reflection - itself motivated by the voices of popular theology - has stimulated a new kind of liberational growth which has seen the church taking on a broader and more conscious role in the liberation of Black communities in Britain. It is from the vitality of these solid structures that the branches of professional level theology have recently begun to emerge, offering an element of critical reflection on the developments which have thus far been implemented. However, like any growth, if the liberational development of the BLC is to become strong and healthy in all of its dimensions there needs to be a close and careful interchange of ideas and action at each level of its theological manifestation. The fact that many of these professional theologians themselves have their roots in the popular liberation of the BLC is not enough if they do not also find ways of making their own analysis and critical reflections accessible to those who make up the bulk of their Churches. Equally it is imperative that the newly emerging professional theologians do not lose their centring in the liberational spirituality of the Church so that they either fall into the trap of "one who is only a theologian and knows only theology" or, similarly undesirable, that of having a "disregard for [their] mystical roots."[101]

Notes and References.

[1] Ronald Nathan, *Evangelicals - Good News in Black and White?* In **Racial Justice**, (Autumn 1993 No. 20) pg. 4.

[2] See for example David Lochhead's argument about dialogue as negotiation in **The Dialogical Imperative; A Christian Reflection on Interfaith Encounter,** (SCM Press 1988).

[3] See for example Boff and Boff, op. cit, pg. 65 and Cone, op cit, (1984) pg. 146.

[4] As for example Kortright Davis argues within the context of the Caribbean. See Davis, op. cit, pg. 100.

[5] E.g. Boff and Boff, op.cit.

[6] Brown, op. cit, pg. 82.

[7] Gutierriez as cited in Brown, ibid.

[8] For example Latin America's emphasis on poverty and class exploitation, the Caribbean's focus on imperialism, Asia's concern for inter faith dialogue, South Africa and Black America's concern for racism. See Cone, op.cit (1984), pgs. 144-6.

[9] For example, *The Well*, a Christian social club and *Equal Yoke* "confidential correspondence service" (as described by its co-ordinator) in Birmingham.

[10] Both groups are informal and do not have official titles as such. What they do have in common is a desire for stronger ties and community action amongst their Churches.

[11] **Focus**, (Summer 1991), an ACEA journal.

[12] Joel Edwards, **Focus,** (Autumn, 1990).

[13] Taken from *ACEA in Action Together*, an information pack.

[14] See for example Philip Mohabir, **Building Bridges**, (Hodder and Stoughton, 1988).

[15] Joel Edwards, in a recorded interview, op. cit.

[16] Ibid.

[17] ACEA publicity material, op. cit.

[18] From a recorded interview, 1992.

[19] Pastor Thompson, op. cit.

[20] Pastor Corbett, op. cit.

[21] Mosquito, op. cit.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Pastor Corbett, op. cit.

[24] They have been given £350,000 by the City Council to explore the possibilities for a Cultural Therapy Centre.

[25] UCHA was born out of the Handsworth and Aston Churches Forum; a collection of both Black and White Churches that was established as a result of interdenominational work that took place following the 1980s riots.

[26] There is, however, no indication of the extent to which culturally specific 'secular' counselling methods are also included in this. See for example Gillian Ramsey, **The Step By Step Guide to Afrikan Centred Counselling**, (Resurrection 2000, 1996).

[27] Pastor Corbett, op. cit.

[28] *Prison Link Return* publicity leaflet.

[29] A term used by Freire, op. cit.

[30] This is a criticism which has been levelled against the Church by some social services departments who argue that in fulfilling a responsibility that should belong to the government, the Churches allow an oppressive status quo to continue unchecked. See Ronald Nathan, *Church and Politics* in **The Voice**, (April 2, 1996) pg. 23.

[31] For example the proposed Cultural Therapy Centre of the Council of Black Churches will be able to begin this process of historical analysis with regards to the links between racism, poverty, gender oppression and mental health. Also the increasing number of conferences and fora for all three organisations will also assist in this process.

[32] ACEA publicity leaflet.

[33] For example see Boff and Boff, op. cit, pg. 27.

[34] Cone, op. cit, (1984), pg. 86.

[35] Brown, op. cit, pg. 91.

[36] Collins, op. cit, pg. 219.

[37] For further details see Alexander in Jarret-Macauley (ed.), op. cit pgs. 94-8.

[38] Ibid.

[39] A useful popular testimony of this is provided by the poet Benjamin Zephania in the Radio 4 broadcast, *Africa To Britain: A Journey of Religion.* (August 1996).

[40] Sometimes written as Africentricity. See Gilkes in Sanders op. cit, pg. 29.

[41] Nathan, op.cit. (**The Voice**, 1996).

[42] One interview respondent (SPF), for example alluded to the fact that her Church was more personally liberating for her *because* it had a more balanced mix of Caribbean cultures.

[43] Winston James in his essay on *Migration , Racism and Identity Formation: The Caribbean Experience in Britain* describes this relationship as "Pan-Caribbeanisation" and gives three reasons for the dominance of Jamaican culture within diasporan Caribbean identity. These are firstly the numerical dominance of Jamaican people in Britain, secondly the overwhelming influence of Jamaican music and thirdly the symbolism of Rastafarianism in youth resistance. See James and Harris (eds.) op.cit. It is important to note that in the sense that these symbols of Jamaican culture are often symbols of resistance, this process of Pan-Caribbeanisation can have a positive outcome in terms of the liberational identity of the Church. However it becomes problematic when a single cultural hegemony discourages a heterogeneous approach to liberational struggle.

[44] Douglas, op. cit.

[45] Oduyoye, in Abraham, op. cit.

[46] Whilst their struggles have not been a focus of this present study, issues of racism and sexism within the Churches have been increasingly documented in recent years. In addition to those reports commissioned by the official bodies of these churches (e.g., the Anglican Church's **Seeds of Hope ,** (1991) and **How We Stand** , (1994) and the Methodist Church' **A Tree God Planted,** (1985) amongst others.) There are also reflective studies carried out by Black members themselves. See Sybil Phoenix, **Willing Hands,** (The Bible Reading Fellowship, 1984) and Kate Coleman, **Contemporary Developments in the Roles and Perspectives of Black Women in the Mainstream Churches**, (unpublished Research paper.) Added to these are pastoral reflections such as that by Maurice Hobbs, **Better Will Come: A Pastoral Response to Institutional Racism in British Churches**, (Groves Books Limited, 1991) and Tony Holden, **People, Churches and Multi-Racial Projects,** (The Methodist Church Division of Social Responsibility, 1984) and more recently, Wilkenson, op.cit.

[47] The Black Theology in Britain Study Group in Birmingham will be explored under the second criterion with which this chapter is concerned.

[48] The directory was drawn from a consultation at the Centre for Black and White Christian Partnership in Birmingham in 1993. In fact very few of the organisations mentioned the need for any kind of Black solidarity at all.

[49] It is also true to say that a limited amount of unofficial dialogue occurs through the increasing number of social and fellowship networks and organisations run by BLCs. In addition to those mentioned earlier in the chapter, they include within the Birmingham area, *The Well* music and social centre initiated by the Church of God of Prophecy and *Club T.F.* initiated by Trinity Fellowship.

[50] Grant & Patel, op. cit (1990), (1992).

[51] See Alexander in Jarret-Macauley, op. cit. pgs. 103-5.

[52] *Directory of Organisations Tackling Racism*, op. cit.

[53] Taken from a publicity leaflet. This bridge-building ethos is symbolised by those who were first involved in starting the centre. For example, those representing the BLC, such as Pastor Corbett and the German Lutheran theologian, Roswith Gerloff.

[54] From a recorded interview with Bishop Dunn, FUCJCA.

[55] Ibid.

[56] In addition to the responses from the current research project. See also the *Keyboard Project* report, **Let us Break Bread Together: Conversations with Leaders of the Black Churches in Bristol,** (available from CBWCP).

[57] The increase of Black recruitment amongst Islam and Nation of Islam organisations in recent years means that these are also important candidates for ecumenical dialogue. As far as the author is aware there are no formalised links with these organisations although on a professional level, the Black Theology in Britain Study Group does provide an important forum of debate for these issues.

[58] There have been a significant number of studies produced on the movement in its original Jamaican context. See for example Morrish, op.cit. Barry Chevannes, **Rastafari, Roots and Ideology**, (Syracuse University Press, 1994) and Chevannes, op. cit (1995).

[59] Winston James, in James and Harris, op. cit. pg. 252.

[60] See for example Ellis Cashmore, *The De-Labelling Process: From 'Lost Tribe' to 'Ethnic Group'* in Chevannes, op. cit, (1995) pgs. 182-4.

[61] Hall in Bocock and Thompson, op.cit, pg. 292.

[62] Cashmore, op. cit.

[63] Afrocentric awareness, is in fact, described as an evolved stage of Black Nationalism. See Asafa Jalata, *African American Nationalism, Development, and Afrocentricity: Implications for the Twenty-First Century* in Dhyana Ziegler (ed.) **Molefi Kete Asante and Afrocentricity: In Praise and in Criticism,** (James C. Winston Publishing Co. 1995).

[64] For example the Ausar Auset society which has its headquarters in London and the development of U.K. based W. African priesthoods.

[65] See for example, Herbert Ekwe-Ekwe and Femi Nzegwu, **Operationalising Afrocentrism**, (International Institute for Black Research, 1994) pg. 9.

[66] See for example the work of Maulana Karenga in **Introduction to Black Studies**, (University of Sankore Press, 1991) who is acclaimed by Molefi Kete Asante (one of the key proponents of Afrocentricty) as one of the key foundation layers of the contemporary Afrocentric movement. Asante, op.cit, (1992) pg. 20. The African scholar, Cheik Anta Diop, author of, amongst others, **The African Origin of Civilization**, (Lawrence Hill and Co. 1974) is also cited as a significant founder of the movement. As a philosophical movement it has also taken direction from the Caribbean and American heritage of the work of Marcus Garvey, Elijah Mohammed and Malcolm X.

[67] In particular the annual Rites of Passage: Education of the Black Child Conference in Manchester organised by the Kemetic Educational Guidance group (KEG) provides a forum for interchange of ideas and regularly features Afrocentric speakers from America. 1995 also saw the first African Centred Research Conference based at the University of Sheffield.

[68] For example Rap and Hip Hop groups such as *Public Enemy, KRS*1 and more recently *Arrested Development.* A further major influence is the film industry, in particular the work of Black film director, John Singleton in *Boyz in the Hood,* and Spike Lee, in the movies, *Do The Right Thing* and *Malcolm X.* This last film has itself created an industry of jewellery and street wear which combines with a resurgence in African inspired dress styles, fabrics and accessories to create a look for the popular intellectual allegiance with Africaness as a symbol of pride.

[69] Karenga, op. cit, pg. xiii.

[70] See Asante, op. cit, (1992) pg. 76.

[71] Walter Arthur McCray, **The Black Presence in the Bible: Discovering the Black and African Identity of Biblical Persons and Nations,** (Volumes 1 & 2 Black Light Fellowship, 1992).

[72] Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, *We Have a Beautiful Mother: Womanist Musings on the Afrocentric Idea* in Cheryl J. Sanders, (ed.) **Living The Intersection: Womanism and Afrocentrism in Theology**, (Fortress Press, 1995) pg. 27.

[73] Op. cit, pgs. 10-12.

[74] Ekwe-Ekwe and Nzegwu acknowledge the criticism of 'romanticisation and idealism' which has been levelled at such categorisation, however they continue to argue the eight traits represent "African essences" which "have constituted the *objective* reality of African existence for several millennia" pg. 13. In particular they critique the works of the African American professor Shelby Steele and Britain's Paul Gilroy; the former for her individualist analysis of Black underachievement in America and the latter for what they identify as the tragedy of his "Euroassimilationist illusion," pg. 18.

[75] See for example Gutierriez categorisation of dominant theology in Brown, op. cit, pg. 91.

[76] See Parsons, op.cit, pg. 266.

[77] Cashmore, op. cit, pg. 185.

[78] Bob Marley's *Redemption song:* "emancipate yourself from mental slavery none but ourselves can free our minds."

[79] Asante, op. cit, (1992) pg. 48.

[80] See for example James, op. cit and Asante ibid. Also Parsons, op. cit, pg. 269.

[81] For example in addition to the seminars and conferences, the afore mentioned Rites of Passage conference, amongst others, has stimulated the development of several educational and mentoring programmes within the Birmingham Area. Many of these groups are staffed, run or organised by people with varying degrees of BLC connections.

[82] Other examples include the establishing of Black Studies courses within several of the Birmingham Churches. A second, Black presence in the Bible conference followed the first one facilitated by a group of Churches in London.

[83] The breadth for ecumenicalism for example, does not yet extend to an Indo-Caribbean dialogue, (see Steven Vertovec, in James and Harris (ed.) op. cit.) nor does it include a dialogue around sexuality.

[84] A term used by Josiah Ulysses Young III in his work, **A Pan African Theology; Providence and the Legacies of the Ancestors**, (Africa World Press, 1992) pg. 94.

[85] See also Lorine L. Cummings etal in Sanders, op. cit, who point out the problems of some Afrocentric approaches from the perspectives of those engaged in Womanist Theology.

[86] Boff and Boff, op. cit, pg. 12.

[87] Taken directly from Muir's *Black Theology: Does it Embrace Us?* talk.

[88] Boff and Boff, op. cit, pg. 39.

[89] Muir, op. cit.

[90] For example many of the organisations mentioned in chapter four have been initiated, organised and run by women in the Church. See for example Alexander in Jarret-Macauley, op. cit.

[91] There are a few accounts which have attempted to respond to the condition of women within the Churches in Britain. Eve Pitts, *Black Womanist Ethic* in Grant and Patel, op. cit, focuses mainly on an overview of the American experience, however there are two unpublished conference papers which do reflect the British context. These are Clarice Nelson, *"The Spirit move but it nuh move so far"* and Abina Griffin *"Triple Jeopardy, Theological Parody."* Both papers were presented at the National Conference on Black Theology at Queens College in 1994. A third paper, raising more general concerns on spirituality and Black women in Britain was presented by the author, *A Black Woman in Britain Moves Towards an Understanding of her Spiritual Rites.*

[92] Nathan, **Racial Justice**, (Autumn 1993, Issue No. 20) pg. 4.

[93] Ibid.

[94] Robert Beckford, **Racial Justice,** (Summer, 1995, Issue No. 24) pg. 10.

[95] Ibid, pg. 11.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Boff and Boff, op. cit, pg. 16.

[98] Davis, op. cit, pg. 141.

[99] Gutierrez, **We Drink From Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People,** (SCM 1984) pg. 137.

[100] See for example Herman Browne's review of Arnold's **From Scepticism to Hope** in **Simon of Cyrene Theological Institute Journal**, (Spring 1995, No 2) pg. 54.

[101] Boff and Boff, pgs. 19 and 64 respectively.

CONCLUSION: THEOLOGICAL LIBERATION AND THE BLC: INTO THE FUTURE

> ***Liberation is the ability to discover your humanity, your personhood. It's about freedom; freedom from anything that says you are less, freedom from anything that dehumanises you. It's difficult to explain; its like trying to explain the sunset, you can't. You first have to feel the warmth of the rays of the sun and when you're liberated, when you're being liberated, you know.***[1]

This study has posed the question *to what extent the BLC in Britain has developed a theology of liberation?* It has attempted to answer this question in the following ways:

Firstly it has sought to clarify the terms of the questions. Chapter one was primarily concerned with defining the BLC and the believers who worship there. It also sought to provide an insight into the meanings of theology and liberation and to sketch out the central problematic of race and gender oppression within the British context. The issue of context has emerged as a central concern of this thesis - one which has underlined both the methodological and theoretical approach as well as the actual findings. For this reason it also contributed to the laying out of the focal problematic of the first chapter. The thesis as stated was that the BLC appears to present itself as something of a conundrum in its manifestation of theological liberation. It offers, to the interested observer, what might be described on the one hand as a public and on the other a private face. The former seems to give assent to conservative and fundamentalist dogma whilst the latter belies this conservatism through its interaction with concrete experience.

In order to provide the theoretical tools with which to explore this dichotomy, the second chapter has focused on international paradigms of liberation. The purpose in so doing was not to directly compare the BLC in Britain with those other contexts but rather to be able to paint a picture of theological liberation working in other locations so that a broad criterion for liberation could be determined and then applied to the British Church. By examining the working contexts of North and Latin America, the Caribbean and S. Africa, six such criteria were unearthed. This provided the theoretical tools for the remainder of the study.

Continuing to underscore an understanding of the BLC as a phenomenon emerging from its own unique context, the third chapter identified several important developmental themes which enable an observer to unravel the conundrum of the BLC's relationship to liberation. The Church has been identified as being part of a wider continuum of variation of African Caribbean Christian expression. It has emerged out of a process of religious and cultural syncretism through which it has combined theological and cultural heritages from Africa, Europe and America. The concept of syncretism has been central to this study since not only does it describe the reality of the liberational heritage of the Church but most significantly, it also defines the nature of that liberation. This means, firstly, that syncretism represents for the Church the *first act* of Liberation Theology as defined by the Latin American theologian, Gutierrez. It symbolises a people's determination to retain elements of their African heritage in the face of ideological impositions of missionary Christianity. Secondly, however, it also means that ACC faith has carried within it the internal contradictions of being born of a Euro-American cultural and

religious experience that was essentially, in spite of its seeming 'sincerity', an ideological tool of imperialism and oppression. Hence, in addition to the themes of heritage, this study has also suggested that the BLC has simultaneously developed through continual processes of continuity, conflict, innovation and conservatism. Since it is most often through the *spirituality* of the Church - the cognitive and affective application of liberation to everyday experience - that the BLC has maintained the elements of continuity and innovation, this study has put forward the idea of a liberational spirituality which has become its core response to oppression.

The fourth chapter tested this theory by applying it to the first two of the criteria for liberation established in chapter two. It has put forward evidence for the claim that the Church can be described as engaging in holistic and contextual liberation although there are key areas in which the full degree of these manifestations can be questioned. The Church is contextual because it has developed its own epistemology, influenced by its African heritage and consolidated through its engagement with struggle. From this epistemology there emerges a range of characteristics which function effectively as tools of liberation for BLC members. It is holistic because it has sought, throughout its development, to respond contextually to a range of experiences of oppression and this, in the past decade, has developed into a tangible community-based self-help programme. The Church has nonetheless been limited in its contextual and holistic development by several factors, perhaps the most significant of which has been its internal response to women. Although women comprise the majority of members within the Churches,

their positions and interests are often marginalised by patriarchal structures and doctrines which restrict their access to positions of headship and impose on them codes of ethics in terms of dress and lifestyle which are not always applied to men. Although women have often themselves colluded in their own marginalisation, there are moves - evident mostly on the margins of the Church experience - that suggest some women are beginning to raise important challenges to this status quo. Similarly, the vital contributions they have made to the liberational development of the Church have begun to gain formal recognition at a popular theological level through celebrationary programmes and history days.

The limitations of contextual and holistic development within the BLC were further explored in chapter five when the second two criteria for liberation were analysed. This study has argued that the Church does, at popular and pastoral levels, engage in social analysis and critical reflection on praxis. However it has asserted that social analysis must be understood contextually from the vantage point of an African-centred epistemology such as, for example, that described by the American feminist writer, Patricia Hill Collins. From such an epistemological stance it is possible to interpret the BLC as engaging in an analysis which is, above all else, grounded in its *experience* of the social world. However, this experiential approach to social analysis is holistic in that it involves cognitive reasoning, emotional relating and moral and essentially spiritual motivation.

The holistic and contextual characteristics of the BLC, then, reveal an engagement with social analysis. Yet to the extent that the Church continues to interact with and essentially to maintain a syncretistic relationship with dominant theology, a further

means of identifying the nature of social analysis within the Church is required. This has been approached by the use of the terms *passive* and *active radicalism.* The implications of passive radicalism are twofold. It suggests, firstly, that the Church's engagement with social analysis does contribute to fulfilling the criteria of liberation and to this extent should be understood as radical. Secondly, however, it also suggests that there are significant limitations to the nature of that radicalism and this is best understood by drawing a distinction between the officially articulated theology of the Church and its holistic experience of liberational spirituality. In the terms of the former, the liberational experience is uni-dimensional, non-explicit and lacking in historical analysis. In the case of the latter, the church has been able to develop a broader, multi-dimensional approach to societal transformation which has meant that it has applied social, economic and political approaches - in addition to its emphasis on conversion - to promote liberational change in society. However, even in this move towards active radicalism, the liberational development of the Church is still restricted by its lack of systematic historical analysis and by its unwillingness or inability to translate its growing commitment to a multi-dimensional methodology back to its officially articulated theology. Consequently its experience of liberation remains unintegrated and marginalised by the continual presence of the themes of conflict and conservatism. Moreover, it has been unable to offer any evaluation of the relationship between class, gender and race on the one hand and its own theological development on the other.

Significant moves towards fulfilling the criteria of an actively radical approach to liberation have also been identified in the pastoral and, particularly the professional

critical reflections on social analysis. The progress of oral and documented reflection has afforded the Church an opportunity to assess the effectiveness of its engagement with liberation and, most significantly, to begin the process of responding to the varied criticisms which have been levelled against it. Part of this response has resulted in a growing level of official Church networking and ecumenicalism through which it has strengthened its bonds with other Churches and also with specific statutory and voluntary groups in its local communities. The objective in so doing has been to broaden its emphasis on community regeneration and to focus particularly in addressing key social issues that concern African Caribbean communities.

However, as with the other criteria for liberation, the Church's move into systematic ecumenicalism and dialogue needs to be qualified by several significant points of criticism. Firstly, some of these ecumenical community initiatives would appear to involve uncritical partnerships with government authorities which serve to reinforce rather than challenge a broader hegemonic control. One such example is provided by the pacifying role the Church was asked to play by the police following the riots of the 1980s. This problem is exacerbated by the Church's lack of systematic historical analysis at the level of many of these networks. Since there is little or no analysis of the social, political and economic *causes* of poverty, racism and gender oppression, it could be argued that there is a tendency for the Church to develop approaches which address the symptoms rather than the causes of oppression. Secondly, the Church appears to have failed significantly to transpose the social realities of its engagement with social analysis to the context of its theological

expression. The ultimate effect of this is that its commitment to a social ministry remains an appendage rather than an integral part of its articulated gospel message.[2]

Nonetheless, in recent years a significant development of liberational expression has emerged from the peripheries of the Church and this has begun to take the form of a professional manifestation of Liberation Theology. Its leading proponents have begun to tackle exactly these weaknesses in the popular and pastoral levels of liberational praxis. Moreover, most significantly, they have, for the most part, retained a respect for and acknowledgement of the foundational expression of liberational spirituality and passive radicalism within the history of their Churches. In so doing they have ensured that their critical reflections have the potential to be contextually applied to the BLC.

The principle expression of liberation within the BLC, then, has emerged in the form of a liberational spirituality which has created, in the terms of the Trinadadian historian, Mervyn Alleyne, its own continuum of variation of resistance.[3] Since there exists within the Church's syncretistic development a generic seed of both resistance and submission to oppression, the boundaries of this continuum can best be defined by the terms passive and active radicalism. The responses of the Churches featured in this study to their liberational contexts varied according to a number of factors: for example, the degree to which they encouraged internal critique and discussion of their theological and social identities; their willingness to engage in wide ranging ecumenical activity; and their degree of commitment to an Afrocentric epistemology. In some instances each of the above considerations were

themselves determined by the denomination's affiliation with White headquarter Churches. However, unlike Brooks,[4] this study did not find a clear, uncomplicated connection between the 'independent' fellowships and increased engagement with active radicalism. For example, Brooks' argument does seem to accord in the case of the SDA Church which has, perhaps, the most integrated relationship with its White headquarters as far as doctrine, ethos and practical church organisation is concerned. During interviews and observations, both members and leaders seemed the least willing to identify themselves as a BLC or to identify social services which were explicitly directed at the needs of its majority Black members. Hence, for example, its two schools (John Loughborough in London and Harper Bell in Birmingham) are understood to be *Church* schools rather *Black* schools, and their Black majority student populations are explained as coincidental.[5] As Pastor Anderson explained; "We try to not stifle out the White congregation and the White aspect of our work and we also don't work on the basis of proportional representation."[6] In a similar way those Churches (FUCJCA and SPF) who were technically independent of White headquarter Churches did seem better able both to articulate their commitment to a contextual gospel and to identify the racism which has historically existed within European Christian practice.[7] However, it is also the case that the NTCG, in spite of its existing connections with its White American headquarter base does - perhaps out of all five Churches - offer the most extensive social ministry to the Black community. Additionally, it has taken, perhaps, the most tangible steps to engage in critical analysis of its praxis, most notably through the study of Selwyn Arnold (but also in the works of Ira Brooks, Joel

Edwards, Elaine Foster and Carol Tomlin) and, most significantly, through the voices of a developing professional theology (for example as articulated by David Muir). Ironically, it may at times be precisely the tensions which exist between the syncretistic themes within conflict that encourage a stronger critical response in an effort to maintain continuity and innovation. Whilst therefore there do appear to be some variables which affect the placing of different denominations and even individual churches on this continuum of variation, it is, nonetheless, impossible to draw up some kind of league table of liberation amongst the Churches. In fact, the continuum is more accurately representative of specific developments of liberation rather than whole Churches. What becomes clear, also, is that the connection with dominant theology is not limited to official connections with White headquarters. Even supposedly independent Churches can maintain an uncritical and conservative response to the theological imperatives of dominant fundamentalist theology. It is, therefore this broader theological link, above all else, which determines a Church's place on the continuum.

It is, for example, principally the desire to accommodate theological 'Whiteness' which inhibits the expression of an explicit contextual theology in all five of the denominations explored. As the feminist writer bell hooks has argued:

> Those black folks who are more willing to pretend that "difference" does not exist even as they self-consciously labor to be as much like their white peers as possible, will receive greater material rewards in white supremacist society. White supremacist logic is thus advanced. Rather than using coercive tactics of domination to colonise, it seduces black folks with the promise of mainstream success if only we are willing to negate the value of blackness. Contrary to James Cone's hope that whites would divest of racism and be

> born again in the spirit of empathy and unity with black folks, we are collectively asked to show our solidarity with the white supremacist *status quo* by over-valuing whiteness.[8]

Translated into theological terms, this means that the unwillingness to merge the real interests of oppressed Black people (expressed through the liberational spirituality of the Church) with the theological articulation of the gospel (currently expressed through the norms of fundamentalism) is a negation of the value of Blackness and therefore, essentially anti-liberational. Since, however, the official theological expression of the Church is not the be-all-and-end-all in terms of its contextually liberational thought and action, it would not be accurate to restrict the identity of the Church to the articulation of its explicit theology. Hence this study asserts that the BLC can best be described as engaging in a predominantly passively radical theological identity - one which is manifested through a holistic and contextual liberational spirituality. This spirituality, being cognitive and experiential, is the foundational medium through which African Caribbean Christians within the BLC come to work out their understanding of God in relation to their social realities. It is, therefore, their *theological expression* although it is not their only or their total 'theology'.

It is, then, the holistic spirituality of the Church that maintains a vital lifeline to liberation. It defines itself contextually and nurtures an African centred epistemology through which social analysis is maintained and critiqued. It encourages an holistic and dialogical approach and provides the framework upon which pastoral, popular and professional liberational expressions are able to develop and respond to

concerns of oppression. In these important ways, the liberational spirituality of the BLC perpetuates the themes of continuity and innovation and respond to the criteria for liberation as set out in this study.

Theology in Development

It can be argued that in order for the six criteria of liberation explored within this study to be completely liberational, they need, above all, to be developmental. Such a concept relates closely to Freire's understanding of conscientization. It means, most specifically, that the Church must go through particular stages of awareness with regard to its establishment of a liberational theology in order for that liberation to be fully effective. Cone, for example, highlights three principal stages in the establishment of Black Theology in America.[9] Boff and Boff, describe four steps in terms of developments in Latin America (the foundational, the building, the settling in and the formalization stage.) In order to reflect the circular rather than linear Afrocentric concept of time,[10] this study finds it useful to borrow from educational theory - in particular David Kolb's application of the Lewinian theory describing the process of experiential learning[11]- in an effort to analyse the developmental process of the BLC. Kolb's theory adapts a circular experience in four stages which include: 1. *Concrete experience.* 2. *Observation and reflections* 3. *Formation of concepts and generalizations* and 4. *Testing implications of concepts in new situations.* The cycle continually repeats itself so that the learning experience is a continual one. The BLC can be said to have embarked on such a learning cycle regarding its relationship to Liberational Theology. For Black faith, as represented in ACC expression, this cycle was initiated on the plantations of the Caribbean with the

concrete experience of slavery and continued to evolve throughout the colonial and post-colonial context. In terms of the Church's development in Britain, it begins with the concrete experience created through the process of migration. As early Church members reflected on their spiritual heritage and on their treatment at the hands of the TBCs where they had temporarily lodged, so the BLC in Britain was born. Conceptualisation occurred as the Churches began the process of etching out for themselves a working identity, recruiting members and formulating a mission plan. It is symbolised well by Joel Edwards when he describes the vision within many of the Churches of having been called to Britain "for such a time as this." The fourth stage in this first cycle is represented by the phase of membership consolidation and Church growth in the 1960s and 1970s. By the late 1970s a new cycle was ready to begin. This time the concrete experience revolved around the children of the original migrant generation as they sought to respond to the social realities of being Black in Britain in a different way than their parents. Observations and reflections here took the form of their own criticisms levelled against the Church's lack of social involvement. It began, too, by the mid to late 1980s, to be documented in the form of pastoral reflections such as those by Brooks and Foster. The conceptualisation in the second cycle has focused on the idea of the Church's responsibility to engage in social ministry. This, for example, was the ideological reasoning behind the NTCG's Department of Social Responsibility, SPF's United Evangelical Project and the ecumenical Council of Black Churches. It was further represented by the formulation of the concepts which identified a need for a developing ecumenicalism amongst the Churches in order to establish theological

links as well as to enhance social ministry. The fourth, practical implementation stage, has occurred as the Churches and networking organisations have begun to become actively involved with each other and with their local and national community contexts.

It can be argued that the Church is now entering into a third developmental cycle in which the concrete experience is being defined by the new concerns for heterogeneous liberation in the closing years of the twentieth century. Observations and reflections are being led by new generations of dissenting voices from within the popular expression of liberation in the Churches. These voices have received responses from those pastors and lay leaders - who have been somewhat conscientized to the cultural, social and political requirements of liberation - through their reflection on the past developments within the Church. Most significantly, a developing professional level of theologians - the majority of whom are themselves pastors, lay leaders and active members of their Churches - are adding their voices to the new conceptualisation of Liberation Theology in Britain. In particular, they offer a more systematic and historically analytical reflection of both liberational progress in the Church and with oppression concerns in society. The last two stages of this third cycle are yet incomplete although several significant themes have begun to emerge.

Conceptual concerns have focused, above all else, on the integrating of social and political mission into the official voice of the Church, thereby contextualising and liberating the official as well as the implicit theology. In so doing, those professional, pastoral and popular theologians who are actively engaged in this process have

committed themselves to implementing a policy of "loving blackness as political resistance."[12] There is, therefore a *conscious* effort to remove the paradox which has been central to the identity of the Church and has led to the idea that one should enjoy the benefits of Blackness in one's spiritual life without allowing that contextuality to somehow blight the maintenance of a supposedly context-free theology.

A second conceptual theme resulting from the third cycle of liberational development amongst the BLC in Britain, is an understanding of the complexity and heterogeneous nature of both oppression and, therefore, of liberation. In the first instance this involves theologians taking seriously the implications of gender, sexuality and class[13] on one's experience of being Black in Britain and of being a BLC member in Britain. In terms of practical implementation it has involved using the methodology of an Afrocentric epistemology to interact with a wide range of social analytical tools in order to better respond to this new heterogeneous awareness. Secondly, it has necessitated theologians rethinking the nature of counter-hegemonic practice vis-à-vis the complexities of the Black experience in Britain. This has meant, in effect, that they have committed themselves to creating a multi-dimensional approach to societal transformation. A third significant response to heterogeneity within the current developments of the BLC has been the commitment to ecumenical alignment with other oppressed groups in British society and to dialogue and engagement with international paradigms of theological liberation.

The fourth, implementation stage, of this current developmental cycle is now beginning to be worked out in the seminaries, departments, conferences and newly formed organisational groups which now exist in many urban centres of the country. However, if the BLC is to develop a fully contextual and holistic Theology of Liberation in Britain, this welcome move into active radicalism cannot simply remain on the margins of the Black theological experience. It must find some way of penetrating into the heart of the theological identity of the BLC and to have an impact on the expanding social and political ministries of the Churches. Ultimately, the completion of this third cycle of development - as well as the creation of future cycles - is dependent upon those new generations of ACC believers who choose to worship within the BLC. As Kim Knott has argued in her study of minority religions in Britain:

> What young British...West Indians chose to do in the name of religion will contribute to the future face of...Black Christianity... Their experience of English culture and religion, of the religion of their parents, of new religious movements...of feminism, political involvement, education, language learning, and so on, will all contribute to the development of their personal identity and the subsequent development of the identity of the groups to which they belong.[14]

A wide range of factors, then, will contribute to the direction of Liberation Theology amongst the BLCs in the future. The evidence from this study is that young people within the Churches do take seriously the challenges of a contextual and liberational faith and have begun to express this through the social ministries of their Churches. In so doing they have drawn from an established African heritage of pragmatism, self-actualisation and commitment to community. However, the study

has also shown that this liberational heritage lies, for the most part, in the inarticulated experiences of these members. Although the Churches have extended individual realities into social programmes, the work is still largely segregated from the conscious voice of the Church. What is therefore required by this new generation is a careful and systematic critical analysis which can be conducted as part of their theological praxis and through the internal and external dialogue of their Churches. This is being attempted currently through the development of a professional level of liberational expression. However, all levels must be mindful of where the Church has come from in order to engage successfully in where it should be going. Above all, this means that all critical analysis must be undertaken with a full understanding and appreciation of the Church's historical engagement with a liberational spirituality. Moreover, an acknowledgement of this spirituality must form the foundation of all actively radical developments within the Church.

The liberational spirituality of the Church is important in that it clearly demonstrates a contextual and implicit theology directly emerging out of and reflecting the needs of the Black experience. It supports the claim that even at its weakest point on the liberational continuum, the Church has offered a passively radical response towards its liberational needs. Acknowledging the liberational spirituality of the Church is also important in that it reasserts the contextual nature of liberation. Since liberational spirituality is inextricably linked to what has previously been described as an alternative power base, it carries within it its own internal seed of counter-hegemonic resistance. Hence it can be nurtured, by active or passive means, to meet the varying circumstances of oppression. In this sense what makes an act

active or passive can be said, to a certain extent, to alter depending on the nature of hegemonic control. In any case liberational spirituality provides the radical component of both encounters with liberation and thereby needs to stand at the centre of all attempts at theological and social development.

The BLC in Britain in these ways can most accurately be described as having developed a liberational spirituality which has served as a significant counter-hegemonic force, not purely for the members of the BLC but also, through them, to Black communities in Britain. In theological terms, this spirituality has facilitated the development of mainly passive - but also some actively radical - responses to oppression. A sensitive assessment of liberation within the BLC must recognise that active radicalism itself needs to be contextually evaluated. It should not seek, as it were, to be dogmatic in its radicality but should work with the complex realities of the people whom it seeks to serve. Further critical assessment asserts that the Church should neither be content with an exclusively passively radical response to the conditions of oppression. It should not only find ways of individually or collectively coping with oppression, but must continually seek out new ways of challenging and opposing it. This is the task of popular, pastoral and professional liberational expressions as the Church faces the challenges of the twenty-first century.

Notes and References

[1] Interview respondent, SPF.

[2] See for example Browne, op. cit.

[3] Alleyne, op. cit.

[4] Brooks, op. cit, (no date supplied), chapter 9.

[5] Pastor Anderson, op. cit.

[6] Ibid.

[7] See for example earlier comments by Bishop Dunn regarding White Churches and those of Pastor Corbett, regarding the need for maintaining a culturally specific understanding of the gospel.

[8] bell hooks, **Black Looks, Race and Representation**, (Turnaround Press, 1992) pgs. 17-18.

[9] Cone, op. cit, (1984), pgs. 24-28.

[10] See for example Mbiti, op. cit, (1971) especially chapter three.

[11] David A. Kolb, *The Process of Adult Learning* in M. Thorpe, R. Edwards and A. Hanson (eds.) **Culture and Processes of Adult Learning**, (Oxford University Press and Routledge, 1993).

[12] hooks, op. cit, pg. 20.

[13] Robert Beckford, has, for example, explored the influences of representations of Black sexuality of theology in his essay, *Does Jesus have a Penis?: Black Sexual Representation and Christology*. It is significant also that the paper was inspired by his own interaction with and reflection on popular theology within his Church. The issue of gender has been explored, for example in the work of Kate Coleman, Abi Griffen and Clarice Nelson (op. cit). Exploration of gender is being further developed by a course to be run this year by Trinity Fellowship, Birmingham, which focuses on the nature of Black masculinity and theology.

[14] Kim Knott, **Religion and Identity, and the Study of Ethnic Minority Religions in Britain,** (Community Religions Project Research Papers, University of Leeds, Dpt. of Theology and Religious Studies, 1986) pg. 13.

APPENDIX 1
Questions asked in survey

Section 1

1. What age are you? Please underline the age group which applies to you.

16-25 26-45 46-65 66 or over

2. Are you male or female?

3. What is your occupation?

4. How long have you been a Christian?

5. How long have you been a member of this church?

6. Do you hold a position in the church? (e.g., choir member, Sunday school leader etc.?)

7. Were you ever a member of any other church? (If yes then please say what church this was and how long you were a member.)

8. Where were you born?

9. If you were born in England where were your parents born?

Section 2

1. How would you describe your cultural background?

2. Do most of your friends have the same cultural background as you?

3. Do most of your friends attend the same denomination as you?

4. Do you participate in any social activities which involve friends who do not have the same cultural background as you? If you have answered yes, are these friends Christians? Are they British?

5. Do you feel you have a culture which differs from British culture? If yes, please say how you feel it differs.

6. Do you think of yourself as British? Please say why you do or don't.

7. Do you feel British society treats you the same as White people? If not please say why not.

Section 3

1. Do you feel that Black people are treated equally to White people in Traditional British Churches?

2. Do you feel there is a good relationship between Black Led Churches and Traditional British Churches? Please explain your answer.

3. Are there any advantages in having a Black pastor?

4. Would you be happy for your church to be led by a capable White pastor? If no, please say why not if you feel able.

5. Why have you chosen to worship at a Black Church?

6. Is it important to worship with people of a similar cultural background? Please explain your answer?

7. Is it important to have Black Led Churches? Why?

8. Do you think there are any differences between Black Christians and White Christians? If yes what are they?

9. Do you feel that Black people in Britain need to have their own leadership figures and role models? Why/why not?

10. Do you think that the Black Church should provide leadership for the Black community? If yes how should it do this?

11. How important do you think it is to succeed in life?

12. How do you relate the Bible to your experiences of life in Britain as a Black person. Please answer as fully as possible.

APPENDIX 2

Interview Guidelines

The interviews were structured and in-depth. They varied depending on interviewee and the following is a list of the core questions only. Interviews lasted from one to two hours. Respondents were selected by 'snowball technique'. Following an initial meeting with the pastor of the Church, recommendations were made for members and leaders for interview. In some cases further suggestions and recommendations were then made by these respondents. Interviews were conducted amongst young and older members in each Church and a range of leaders were also highlighted for participation.

1. Why and how did you become a Christian?
- Why did you become a member of this Church/why have you remained a member of this Church?
- Is it important to worship at a BLC?
- Are there any advantages in having a pastor who is Black ?
- Do you feel you have a specific cultural identity?
- Do you integrate this with your Christian life?
2. Do you have a specific role in your church?
3. Do you feel that British society treats you equally?
- If not how do you feel about this?
- Does your faith help?
- Why do you believe oppression exists?
- Do you feel that your faith is different to that of a White Christian?
4. How important is the material side of your life?
- How important do you consider the after-life?
- Do you feel that your views on an after-life effect how you respond to oppression?
- Is the oppression you receive at the hands of people more or less important than the oppression of sin?
5. Do you feel your church has a role to play in the social, economical and political areas of life?
- Should your church work with: other Black Churches, other White Churches, other Black organisations, in order to achieve justice in British society?

6. Does the Church give you inspiration and guidance for living your life as a Black man/woman in British society?

7. Is there anything else you would like to say?

In addition to these basic areas, individual respondents were questioned on the details of their specific roles within their church and women were questioned on their position in society and in the Church.

APPENDIX 3

Sermon Topics and Scripture References

Notes taken from the sermon note book of Reverend Williams for 1990-91

GOALS AND AIMS:

To start off with he lists aims and goals for 1990-91 and these are concerned with the following areas:

1. Each auxiliary group working together; presumably for mutual benefit.
2. Review of membership; consisting of questioning the intentions of those most active members
3. Loyalty as a board member - it seems in view of keeping confidences.
4. Conference; on dealing with modesty in the church in terms of dress code etc.
5. Members meeting; to have no agenda but to provide an opportunity for people to "voice hurt".[1]

SERMON TOPICS

1. *FAMILY LIFE - A BUILDING BLOCK OF SOCIETY*

   "we can cure society through our example"

   SR: Ephesians 5v22 -6v1[2]

2. *DIVINE DELIVERANCE - "I WILL NEVER LEAVE YOU OR FORSAKE YOU"*

   we need to call on God in distress

   APPLICATION: ***" are you under attack because of your faith in God? Do you feel imprisoned tonight? Does everything seem to be going against you? Do not give up."***

SOLUTIONS: praising God brings deliverance - "can you praise God amidst your experiences?" Praying and giving praise to God vital in these circumstances.

3. *STAND STILL AND SEE GOD*

   SR: Exodus 14 v1-31

We are in a spiritual battle and need to act according; "How are you fighting? - Victory can be yours"

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[1] This would seem to be in keeping with the policy that Rev. Williams outlined to me in which he stated that rather than having an explicit approach to confronting racism in the sense of an aggressive position, the church aimed to concentrate more on instilling confidence and self worth in its members; making them aware of `who they are in Christ'.

[2] SR = scripture reading

Just as Pharaoh declared war on God's people, the Devil declares war on the church. God's people are surrounded, "who are you fighting for this morning?"

APPLICATION: face your battles positively, don't blame anyone else and don't regret coming out of sin.

"many times we try to defend ourselves, is God telling us to be still today?" God fought for his people, He protected them and provided a way for them. He destroyed the enemy and was glorified.

CONCLUSIONS; "some might be having some hard fights. Some might be in the midst of a fight. I am recommending trust in God"

4. *THE BELIEVERS POSITION IN THE WORLD*

SR: Matthew 5 v 13-16

We are God's representatives on earth therefore we have a great role to play in society.

"We are losing our identity, we are influenced by society"

We are the salt of the earth we mustn't lose our flavour.

CONCLUSIONS; Christ is our power house and the Holy Spirit is our transformer, we are dependant on Him.

5. *JESUS WANTS TO MEET YOUR NEED.*

SR: John 5 2v9

Healing; Jesus is willing and able. "We need to expect great things from God. Expect spiritual healing, mental and social, also physical."

APPLICATION; How long have you had that problem? Jesus can deliver you.

The importance of faith; "will you obey Jesus tonight? Trust in Him for your salvation, trust in Him for your need?

6. *THE RESULT OF POWERFUL FAITH*

SR: Matthew 8 v 5-13

Faith brought deliverance. God will honour our faith in Him.

7. *DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GODLY AND UNGODLY*

SR: Psalms 1.

Society makes a distinction between Black /White, rich/poor; Black is portrayed as bad and White as good. Jesus, however makes a distinction between Godly and unGodly. We may have no choice in the former distinctions but we do in the latter. The Godly will last whilst the unGodly will ultimately disappear.

8. *EXPERIENCES OF THE EARLY CHURCH: HITHERTO THE LORD HAS HELPED US*

SR: Acts 8 1-3, 9: 1-6

Church struggles and internal problems, identifying and denouncing internal sin. The persecution the early church faced; "**our persecution might be unbearable but it has not come to this stage as yet.**"

9. *THE CHRISTIAN RACE - COMPARISON OF CHRISTIAN LIFE WITH A RACE*

SR: Hebrews 12 1-3

We are all competitors we need to prepare, get rid of all hindrance, keeping your focus.

10. *NOTHING BUT THE BLOOD*

SR: Exodus 12 3, 5-7, 12-13

Israel was in bondage for 400 years, we are also in bondage to fear, personal problems, bad habits, the spotless lamb can bring freedom.

11. *A CALL TO REMEMBRANCE*

SR: Deuteronomy 8 v 1

Humans tend to forget the good and remember the bad. We must remember God's blessings, remember what he has brought you through.

12. *THE FULLNESS OF TIME HAS COME*

SR: Galations 4 v 4

Signs in the world and in the church indicate to the coming of time. In the economic world too, poverty, economic crisis, heavy taxing, single currency in Europe. Moral disintegration and in the spiritual world.

13. *REPORTING ON THE PROMISED LAND*

SR: Numbers 13: 26 -14, 10

There will come times when we need to make important decisions. We need to apply God's promises, avoid the calling of the devil. Don't become bitter to God in times of difficulties.

14. *THE NATURE OF ISAIAH'S VISION - WE NEED TO HEAR FROM YOU*

SR: Isaiah 6, 1-8

We need to know the vileness of society and to turn to God for revelation.

15. *TURNING OVER A NEW LEAF*

SR: 11 Chronicles 33: 1-16

Although defeat can come into our lives we can make positive changes for the better.

APPENDIX 4

(Document 1)

New Testament Church of God - Handsworth

Youth Night Service

There are a range of choruses seeing in the congregation as they settle down to their seats. The pews are nearly in the middle and to one side and half full on the other side which means that attendance is nearly as it was for the morning service. This, I am told, is good, although the numbers may only be so large because it is a special service; youth night.

A young woman leads the choruses from the front. I shall refer to her as the worship co-ordinator. She makes a call for the Holy spirit to take His place in the meeting whilst the choir pray for those that will take part.

chorus:

His Spirit is here
His Spirit is here
He comes like a fire of love to ignite
All who believe, all who believe
O holy Spirit.

The church joins in unison as they pray collectively and loudly over the choruses of the choir. The worship co-ordinator's voice leads out, the prayer continues. One woman's voice is heard above the rest as a virtual scream as she prays. The worship co-ordinator (w.c.) continues to sing in a prayerful mode and incites people to *"just worship God in your own way"*. The musicians follow her lead. The prayer which had risen to a crescendo has quietly ended but the singing continues and the odd person cries out "*praise God*"; all worship. Finally the w.c. sings out `one more time'. The song ends and the w.c. speaks out *"thank you Jesus"*, the congregation responds with *"amen"*.

The w.c. is a young woman. This is a youth service. She reminds the congregation of the youth choir leader, Rose, who led in the morning on a theme of worship and praise. She says she will take up on the same theme, it will be a praise and worship service:

I just want you to feel free to worship God in whatever way you feel. Just feel open unto the Spirit. The Spirit is here and we just want you all to just be submitted to Him.

She requests that before they go any further people stand in a prayer of thanksgiving for the release of Terry Waite and for the healing of the boxer Michael Watson. She talks about his healing being a miracle; he was in a coma, people prayed for him and he responded to treatment. She asks that people stand up and give thanks. The congregation pray. After a few minutes she breaks into the chorus:

He's a miracle working God
He's a miracle working God
He's the alpha and the omega
He's a miracle working God

The chorus is lively and the congregation join in enthusiastically with hand clapping, dancing and tambourine playing. Once again the chorus is repeated many times and the whole session lasts for a good few minutes. The musicians improvise with the music, giving the song extra rhythm and zeal. The young and old people sway or dance to the music. The atmosphere is informal (there are ushers and members coming in and out of church, going up the aisle, talking to people for various reasons and people are still arriving). The w.c. finally sings out `one more time' and the chorus ends enthusiastically with 'amens'. She announces a scripture reading to be taken from Psalms 71 v 8-24. A young woman comes up to read. The reading is taken from the King James edition:

Let my mouth be filled with thy praise and with thy honour all the day. Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth. For mine enemies speak against me; and they that lay wait for my soul take counsel together, saying, God hath forsaken him: persecute and take him; for there is none to deliver him. O God, be not far from me: O my God, make haste for my help. Let them be confounded and consumed that are adversaries to my soul; let them be covered with reproach and dishonour that seek my hurt. But I will hope continually, and will yet praise thee more and more. My mouth shall shew forth thy righteousness, even of thine only. O God, thou hast taught me from my youth: and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works. Now also when I am old and grayheaded, O God, forsake me not; until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power

to every one that is to come. Thy righteousness also, O God, is very high, who hast done great things; O God, who is like unto thee! Thou which hast shewed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth. Thou shalt increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side. I will also praise thee with the psaltery, even thy truth, O my God; unto thee will I sing with the harp, O thou Holy One of Israel. My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing unto thee; and my soul, which thou hast redeemed. My tongue also shall talk of thy righteousness all the day long: for they are confounded, for they are brought unto shame that seek my hurt.

The reading ends with a unison of *"praise the Lord"* from the congregation. The w.c. comes back to the microphone and commences singing another chorus. It is a slow one, the congregation joins in immediately:

I love you Lord and I lift my voice
To worship you O my soul rejoice
Take joy my king in what you hear
Let it be a sweet, sweet sound in your ear.

People worship freely; some have eyes closed, some have hands raised. The chorus is repeated many times over. The lead voice is a very soulful and emotional one. Individuals respond with "praise God". The 'one more time' comes after several minutes. there is a unison of "praise God" and "thank you Jesus" from the congregation. This lasts for a while and worship continues; it crescendos and then quietens.

The w.c. introduces two little girls who approach to sing. The congregation applauds as they come. The girls sing without accompaniment at first but then the musicians pick up the song:

I just wanna thank you Lord, thank you Lord
I just wanna thank you Lord
I just wanna thank you Lord
I just wanna thank you Lord.

The congregation keeps rhythm with hand claps and after the girls have repeated a few times the w.c. joins in as do some of the congregation. At the end of the chorus she says 'amen' as if to indicate that the song has finished but the girls continue and she allows them to and continues to sing with them. At the end the congregation

clap. She explains that the Sunday School lesson for that morning was all about giving praise and thanks to God and she observes that it is so good to see young children praising God. The congregation agrees and she reminds them that this is exactly what they should also be doing: *"Just open our hearts and allow the Spirit within to just flow within and around us. I'm sure we will always have the victory as long as we stay in God's will"*. She finishes with 'amen' which the congregation respond to with the same.

She introduces two young boys who come to play, the congregation applauds as they come. The boys play **"Great is Thy Faithfulness"** on the flute. The musicians pick up a little to accompany them. A few members of the congregation sing along. They play a few verses before the w.c. begins singing the words and the congregation join in with her:

Great is thy faithfulness, great is thy faithfulness
Morning by morning new mercies I see
All I have need needed thy hand has provided
Great is thy faithfulness Lord unto me.

She announces that they will sing it one more time before someone will come to speak but once the chorus has been sung she sings `one more time' which means that it is then repeated. As the chorus ends she requests that as the young woman, Julie, approaches to speak, people pray for her in their hearts. The congregation responds with "praise the Lord".

The young woman reads from Hebrews 10 v22-25:

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; for he is faithful that promised. And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works. Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

She reads with conviction and having finished she begins to exhort, expanding on the verses. (Brackets indicate congregational responses, this is sometimes individual, sometimes in unison).

Starting from verse 23. These times are troubled times when we really need to hold fast to the profession of our faith. The word hold fast is to retain, to seize, to grab or

to hold unto the profession of our faith. We've all seen those classic films where someone's going down the river and the boat capsizes and then they see a log and they're holding onto it cause they know if they let go of it they're gonna die [yeah] because they can't swim. That is the same enthusiasm and earnestness we should have to hold onto our faith in these days. There are many waves we can see around us but we don't need to capsize because we have got the faith which is in Jesus Christ which is more than we need any thing else. We've also got to remember to hold tightly because when we look back to where we've been coming from we all could have drowned in the sea of sin but we saw that love, we saw that lighthouse which is Jesus Christ our Lord. There is no time for us to try and turn back to our ways and what God has saved us from we have to remain strong in the word and strong in the faith [yes]. It also says without wavering. Many times we may get doubts. This is not from God. We may be fearful, we may have negative thoughts, our circumstances may toss around us to try and weaken that hold but we've got to remember that the word says without wavering and we've got to hold unto this. God has promised, it says that 'for He is faithful' and He has promised. We've just finished singing Great is thy Faithfulness; the more we realise the faithfulness of God, through what He's brought us through [amen] is the more faithful we should be to Him as His people. We can also look to psalm 34 where David, he mentioned many things, he said 'I sought the Lord and he heard me and he delivered me from my fear' [the audience say these verses with her]. He also said that 'the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous and his ears are open unto their cry'. He also said `many are the afflictions of the righteous but the Lord delivered them all'. You may have circumstances, those ways may come but the Lord is gonna deliver you. Don't let Satan take your opportunities to defeat you from the faith. Don't let him blind you to what is going on, we've got to remember that with Jesus we've got a 100% guarantee of deliverance [yes] and as Sam said this morning when we're in the valley we know that we will be seeking God more because we know He's gonna bring us through, therefore we shouldn't waver, we shouldn't doubt because the word says fear not. If we do our part He's gonna be faithful to us because His ears are open unto the cry of the righteous [praise God]. Also, verse 24, it says provoke one another unto love and good works. These are the times when you need the encouragement from your brothers and sisters. We've got to provoke one another

and stir up one another. If you see a liquid like custard or cement when it starts to get cold it gets thick but you've gotta get the spoon and stir it up and rekindle that liquidness that's how we've got to rekindle the joy [yes] that we have in Christ, the peace we have in Christ [yes]. We've got to rekindle it continuously. We've got to provoke one another. We need each other, no man is an island, nobody knows everything [hmn hmn], all of us have come through different experiences [hmn hmn] different ways of life and we can all teach each other [yes]. When we become inflated with pride that no-one can tell anything that is when we become as hard as that cement [hmn hmn], that is when we're gonna fall flat on our faces because we're not listening, we're not being stirred up, we need to stir up one another. When you feel sometimes that you're down if you encourage someone else. I find that sometimes when you witness to other people the word you speak feed back into your spirit and it challenges you as well [that's right]. So its not a matter of just staying in your little corner and saying oh I'm depressed, I'm this, but when you get out there you might help someone else [that's right] and it might feed back into you. As you speak this is going back into your spirit. You might be unemployed you probably haven't got a job but as you encourage someone you might say oh its not that bad you know cause I'm handling it this way or that way and as you listen to yourself you yourself will provoke someone, you'll stir up someone and you'll stir up yourself. The scripture also says not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together. As I said before, we need each other so much as we see the day approaching, even moreso now we need to be stirred up unto the Lord. This is not time to get conceited, complacent and to go into that cold cement but we need to keep the fire of the Lord burning within us [amen] we can't let the recession and all those kind of activities weaken our grasp in God because we know that our saviour went to Calvary for us [yes], because He's faithful He's going to deliver us. Any affliction that you have, God is guaranteed to deliver you out of. There is nothing you've got into that He can't deliver you from. Whatever the problem might be God's hand is not too far to just touch you and to bring you out. But the main thing I want to just leave with you is that we've got to just hold fast to our faith in these days [yes] and we've got to help one another and provoke one another unto good works. If somebody comes to you with bad council, you've just got to weigh it up; is this advice good works, is it to love or is it to destruction, is it to hate and is it to division ,

if its that kind of provocation you're getting [yes] you don't need it, but if its unto holiness unto profession [praise God] of faith, encouraging you as a Christian and to strengthen you, then that is the kind of word [praise God] in these days. I just want to encourage you all as I encourage myself [yes] just to hold fast..

The exhortation ends in a unison "praise the Lord" and applause from the congregation. The w.c. begins another chorus:

Jesus is on the main line tell Him what you need
Jesus is on the main line tell Him what you need
Jesus is on the main line tell Him what you need
You just call Him up and tell Him what you need
You can call Him up, call Him up
Tell Him what you need
Call Him up, call Him up
Tell Him what you need
Call Him up, call Him up, tell Him what you need
Jesus is on the main line now.

The chorus is lively and accompanied by dancing, tambourine playing and enthusiastic musicians. It lasts even longer than its predecessor and when it ends it does so with much applause and praise; "Glory, hallelujah, glory, glory". This builds to a crescendo and lasts for about a minute. The w.c. leads with "thank you Jesus", there is intermittent hand clapping, some people are stamping their feet, clearly the congregation is getting `into the spirit'. As things quieten the w.c. announces a young woman who is to sing, once again she request that the congregation pray for her as she approaches. She is applauded as she comes, the congregation is still praising.

As her introductory lines are played she incites; *"shall we praise the Lord"*, the congregation responds, *"praise the Lord"*. This is repeated. She continues:

I really do have to give God glory, honour and praise for bringing me
in His house another night just to worship Him and just to lift him up

She introduces her song, **I'm Bound For That City:**

There's a city of light
Where there cometh no night
And the sun never fades in the sky

Often times we are told
That the streets are pure gold
And the cool, gentle river runs by
I'm bound for that city, God's Holy White city
Oh yes I am
I'll never turn back to this world anymore
No matter how rough may be the way
No matter how oft I stop to pray
I'm bound for that city on that evergreen sure

The congregation respond throughout the repeat of the verse and chorus with `yes, oh yes, praise God'. The chorus is repeated several times. The song ends with applause from the congregation and the w.c. requests that she repeats the chorus whilst a young man approaches to give his talk. The end of the repetition is greeted with 'praise God' and worship from the congregation.

Patrick, the young man, introduces his topic as doing the will of God. He reads from Romans 12 v1-2.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable, unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind. that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

We see here that Paul was imploring the Roman brethren to make themselves a dedicated sacrifice to God in both their bodies and their minds. In this age that we're living today its important for us to make sure that our lives are set apart for God. That our image is not blurred with that of other things. It says here in the second verse that we should not be conformed to the world but be transformed and changed. We should be different people and it says we should have a newness in all that we do and think and then we'll see God's purpose at work. If we also turn to 2nd Timothy chapter 2 [praise God], sorry second Timothy chapter 3 v 16-17 it reads; `all scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine for reproof, for correction, for instruction, for righteousness that the man of God made perfect, thoroughly furnished into all good works'. He says the whole Bible is given to us by inspiration from God and is useful to teach us what is true and make us realise

what is wrong in our lives. It strengthens us and helps us to do what is right which is God's way of making us well prepared at every point to do good to everyone. You see here Paul was exhorting Timothy to continue in the things he had learned from the scriptures. He warns him of the time that was coming when men would not endure sound doctrines, but after their own lust shall they reap to themselves teachers, having itching ears. Its important that we keep the word of God in our hearts that when these false doctrines comes through we'll be able to tell them apart from the true word of God.

Also turn to James 1 v 5 we read here if any of you lack wisdom let him ask God who gives to all men liberally... The living Bible reads; `if you want to know what God wants you to do ask him and he will gladly tell you for he is always ready to give a bountiful supply of wisdom to all who ask. That scripture there speaks for itself; all you need to do is ask and you'll receive...

The remainder of Patrick's talk emphasizes the idea that the believers should make the most of all the time that they have to do God's will. The end of his talk is greeted with the unison `praise the Lord' of the congregation.

The w.c. returns to introduce two or three special testimonies. In fact a long line of children and young people come forward to testify. Not all of them are clearly audible, some of them are just one liners and many are emotional and tearful. One young woman cries as she speaks of her breakthrough experience with the Holy Spirit a year after having been baptised. The congregation encourages her with `praise the Lord'. Another young woman relates as follows:

Since I got baptised last year God's really opened my eyes. I passed exams and everybody was overjoyed about it but I was already at the school and I didn't wanna leave all my friends or anybody behind I was so upset I just wanted to cry. Then I went upstairs and I was speaking to God and I just burst into tears and I didn't know what was happening and I moved and am now at school. God's really told me that although at times we think that He's left us and He's leaving us, everything He does is for a good cause [amen] and no matter what He'll always be there. So my testimony is, how does the song go? My way might not be easy, but when I get down God guides me all the way to comfort me [praise God, praise the Lord].

The testimonies talk about God's faithfulness and constancy. They contain requests for prayer.

One young man:

I was saved in `87 and I've had good times, bad times, smooth times, rough times, but the one thing that has always been the same, God has always been there when I've needed Him and when I fell down I've always known that He's there that's the one thing that keeps me going just knowing that He's promised He'll not leave me and I'd just like to share one verse; Hebrews 13v5; `I'll never leave thee or forsake thee' and that's one verse that I keep very close to my heart. That keeps me going [praise the Lord].

One young woman reads from Ecclesiastes 7 and relates that it is relevant to her because she came to know Christ through the death of her father. She came to understand that there's more to life than just having a good time. Christ is the one thing that brought her through all the problems she had:

...even now with my present situation; two children, my job, my studies, I sometimes wonder how do I do it? But I put my faith and my trust in the Lord. I know that with the problems I have I can turn to Him and I can go to Him...Before I got scared, I was in a desperate situation and I went down on my knees one day and I said to the Lord, if you deliver me out of this situation I'll serve you for the rest of my life [praise the Lord], and now that day has come to pass I've no intention of going back. Pray for me in Jesus name [praise the Lord].

One final, tearful testimony is brought in song by a young woman:

We have read what they did to our Lord
The one who did come as the Word
He came to us all without lying
He came to us all without -
He taught that we all should live loving
Taught that we all should live true
No lying, no fighting, no backbiting
For He's gone to prepare us a mansion
Somewhere up in the air
And I'm going, yes I'm going
Although I have been so unfaithful
I know He will pardon my sin
From mortal, to immortal I shall be.

She repeats the chorus to musical accompaniment and the congregation express their support. As she finishes they applaud and `praise the Lord'.

The w.c. thanks everyone for their testimonies and encourages them all to stay in God. She warns it is going to be hard but as long as they stay in God they will have the victory. She announces the taking of the offering which is taken whilst the choir sings. This is preceded by prayer.

first song.

Free at last it is finished
Life has triumphed over death
Jesus reigns bless the name of
God almighty free, free at last

second song.

Sing unto the Lord a new song
Sing unto the Lord all the earth
Sing unto the Lord a new song
For He is worthy to be praised
For He is worthy to be praised.

The songs are applauded and the w.c. who has been the lead on the last of the songs, now starts the congregation on a new chorus:

Jesus breaks every fetter
My Jesus breaks every fetter
Jesus breaks every fetter
And He will set you free

The congregation stands and worship continues through the slow and moving chorus. The w.c. calls for Michael, the speaker for the night, to come forward as the chorus in being sung and calls for others to come and pray for him. She wipes away tears as she makes the request. The two who pray for the speaker do so in tongues. The chorus continues whilst members of the congregation shout 'hallelujah'. Prayer also continues. The w.c. calls finally for one more time and the chorus ends in 'praise the Lord, praise God' from the congregation.

The main talk

I don't know about you but I can certainly say the spirit of the Lord is here [yes]. This evening reminds me of the old times when we used to allow God's spirit to just come

into our presence. We just worshipped, we just sang freely, we just gave God everything we had and I say we have been touched today [praise God] and God's been saying so much to all of us from this morning through the talks we've had, God's been saying so much, its important that we stop and think [yes], its not just young people doing their thing and they've done it well, its God speaking to each and everyone of us [yes, oh yes], telling us how he wants us to be [praise God]. I'll try and be as short as possible the time is gone from us. I'd like to speak to you on commitment to Christ against the odds. Commitment to Christ against the odds and certainly some of the things we've heard already talks of this word commitment; giving ourselves to Christ despite the obstacles that we may face. We live in a world where certain types of commitment is frowned upon. People don't like the word commitment sometimes and you can think of marriage. Marriage nowadays is frowned upon because people see it as unnecessary; why commit yourself to a situation when you're bound by law, bound by pressure, bound by people around you? A lot of people are swaying away from the commitment of marriage because its too much for them, it means they've got to give themselves to it and people can't handle that anymore. There are other types of commitment that are considered to be extreme. We have the animal rights movement, one of many examples where we look upon them and we think, that looks a little bit far fetched, we care for animals but people are going just a little bit over the top. I'm sure we read in the newspapers where many animal rights people have gone and caused explosions around the country because the scientists are experimenting on animals, and yet these people are committed to a cause so much so that they'll violate the human law just to allow their cause to be heard. And the ethics of the day are very much, lets live and let live; lets be middle of the road, lets be easy going, lets take life very easy, but yet the Christian is challenged to live a committed life [yes]. There's no easy going, there's no middle of the road, its all the way for God [yes, praise God].

I looked at the word commitment and tried to decipher what it really meant and many words came to me from some of the dictionaries that I read. And the sort of words that were coming out were; to commit, to entrust, to adhere to, dedication, devotion, involvement. Commitment is an active word. It involves you doing something. It's not passive, passive says you sit back and you let it all happen,

commitment is an active word, it requires some involvement, some response from you and from me as well. What's a Christian commitment all about? It begins by signing a contract of death. When we come to Christ we sign a contract of death. We declare...(tape is turned)...and once war is declared he has no choice but to go and fight. He may have thought at the time he made a mistake, but the fact of the matter is he is signed up to fight for his queen and his country and on declaration of war he must go and fight and we saw that instance in the Gulf war where many people who had left the army five and three years on were called up to re-sign up and to go and fight for the cause of Britain in the Gulf war and many of them probably thought oh, I'll let it go, but they had signed on the dotted line, committing their lives, themselves, to serve queen and country. And so it is with the Christian, when we join God's army, we're saying to God, here I am [yes], wholly available to be used by you [yes] as you would will. And Paul exhorts us to be soldiers he says put on the whole armour of God that we may stand in the evil days. In Galations 2 verse 20 Paul says 'I am crucified with Christ, non the less I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the son of God who loved me and gave himself for me'. We are to be active in the work of God [yes], we commit ourselves. Was it Luke who told us in chapter 14 of his book about the cost of disciple? When we come to Christ, we give him our all, its gonna cost us our lives [yes]. He talks about the king going out to war, he considers the cost before he goes against his enemy cause he knows that lives will be lost, its gonna cost him to fight a battle, and so it is with us when we commit our lives to Christ [yes], that is the very beginning, that's us saying yes to Jesus, and the moment we say yes we begin the contract of death where we die, Christ comes to life and we begin to battle against the enemy.

So why should we be committed to Christ? The main reason is we have a cause to be committed to. Its not just commitment for commitment sake, its because once we sign up into God's army we have a cause to fight for. There are many people in this world who are committed to some cause or another and many people who take it as their sleeping and their waking, their breath, their food, their drink , their everything to fight for this cause. We have the IRA and if we look into the story behind the whole thing we might think its somewhat strange but these men have a cause, and we know very well that they're going throughout the world and when they're ready

they plant a bomb here and there and they're aware that they're killing lives, but they have a cause and they're fighting for that cause [yes sah]. The Palestinians have a cause and they're fighting at this very moment for a piece of land which they believe belongs to them, and no matter what, they're not stopping, they believe they have a cause and they're fighting for it. The P.L.O is well known throughout the world and they're trying to bring them round the peace table and maybe nothing will come of it but the Palestinians are gonna hold on and they're gonna hold on and they're gonna fight for their cause. I mentioned earlier the animal rights people, they will do all sort of things now they will contaminate food, they've got a cause which they are prepared to fight for. Whatever their cause they are prepared to take radical action tom make sure they are heard and they are very unapologetic about what they believe in. You talk to one of them and they'll tell you quite plain that they don't care, this is what they believe. I watched central weekend and saw a woman up in arms for the fact that they were experimenting on animals even though some of the experimentation had perhaps caused people with cancer to live a better life, she was up in arms and declaring that it was wrong and she wouldn't give anyone else a chance to speak because she believed in animal rights and she was making it quite clear to all the viewers that she believed and that's what she was gonna stand for. Some people will kill for it and some are prepared to die for their cause, yet we as Christians would say how worthless their cause is in comparison to the cause that we have. We have the greatest commission ever. No other liberation movement, no other movement of any kind can compare to the commission, the cause that we have. And Jesus told us very plainly in Matthew 28 that we should go and win the loss for him for his sake. Jesus commands us to go and preach to all nations and He also commands us to live a holy life. We can preach, but we've got to live, our life must back up everything that we're saying because this is the cause. When He says you must make disciples, that is us teaching them, bringing them up and we can teach by words, but we've gotta teach by our lives also [yes]. Holiness is what we believe in, holiness is what we stand for and that's the cause that God wants us to proclaim to all the world. The disciples were very much committed to that cause, and after that great experience in the upper room in Act chapter 2 they were challenged to go out and do everything the master had told them to do. They experienced a life changing transformation, the transformation that Patrick was talking about in

Romans 12, transforming our minds. We no longer become the people we were, we become new people, God creates a new thing within us and then we're committed to that cause. We can read in Acts 4 and 5 where, in chapter four Peter and John laid their hands on the man at the temple at the gate before he was healed and they were taken before the Sandhedran's council and they were told, don't preach in this man's name again, and despite that, their response wasn't one of, O.K. they're up against us, we wont teach. They said no, in fact they went back into the upper room and prayed and they prayed that God would give them boldness, boldness to continue preaching the gospel. In the face of persecution, the disciples rathered to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, to commit themselves to that cause than to be afraid of persecution they would face. They were commanded not to preach in the man's name, they were beaten; in chapter five it says that they were flogged and told to go away and yet they still went back and preached and asked God, give us more boldness that we may preach your word. Notice they didn't pray that God would take the persecution away, they didn't pray that God would hide them from it, they prayed for boldness to continue despite the persecution, boldness to continue despite the suffering. They had what you might call an irresistible compulsion to preach the word of God [yes]. There was something within them that made them want to go on and preach the word of God regardless. And some might think that's mindless; why go and do something when the opposition against you is so great? The Romans were prepared to go all out and kill and the apostles were aware of this, they faced the possibility of death to preach in this man's name.

We're talking about commitment to Christ against the odds and we're all aware that we face many odds when we commit ourselves to Christ. I don't need to tell you of the troubles you face. I don't need to tell you of your own personal testimonies of the battles you had to go through and come out victorious. You know for yourselves. A transformation of life causes us to commit to Christ regardless of our situation, no matter what you're going through that transforming power causes you to commit you have no option but to commit to Christ. There are many instances in the Bible where men and women were not fearful to stand up for what they believed in even though the odds were stacked up against them. We can look at Elijah...one man against four hundred and fifty Baal prophets, yet Elijah was committed to his course, he knew who he believed and he was standing for that. Gideon was another man... the

odds were stacked against Gideon, and Gideon, by human understanding should have lost that battle yet when they gathered around that valley and cried the sword of the Lord and of Gideon, Gideon was victorious [praise the Lord]. These sort of odds are ones that seasoned gamblers would not bet upon...though the human odds may appear impossible we need to know that the heavenly odds; the Jesus odds, the Holy Spirit odds are well in our favour. What I'm saying to you, there's nothing too hard for God, there is no situation that you can experience that can come up against the power of God and defeat it, that's the confidence that these men had when they stood where they stood, knowing that God was ultimately victorious; no matter what they went through, they were on the winning side. And we need to step out of our human mind that's why Paul said be transformed [yes], because our human mind says, we can't do it, but the spiritual mind says with God all things are possible. The Bible says...the angels of the Lord encampeth around those that fear Him and He delivereth them. We have God on our side, we need to be committed to a work of God [praise God].

So how can we commit ourselves? Commitment is an active word we have to do something...you might hold the belief but that is not commitment...it is the giving of what we receive that makes us committed people. We need to be careful that we don't sit within ourselves and discuss and share and experience and not give what we've got to give. The giving out of what we've got inside is a measure of how much we believe what we preach...Do people know what you believe in?...its in our sharing of the gospel, its in our telling of the gospel, its in our living of the gospel, its in our involvement in our own local church. Many of us have a call, where is our commitment to our calling...God is calling us to be committed to whatever God called you to do...this is our commission to present ourselves as a living sacrifice everyday, giving it over to God and when we give it over to God He gives us something back in return. [praise God]. It was Paul, a man in chains...yet he said he was in chains for Christ sake. It didn't prevent him and in fact he even saw it as an opportunity to preach the gospel even more...he saw himself as a prisoner of God...As the song says; `I'm a prisoner of love, a slave to the master, I'll willingly toil in the heat and the cold. I seek no reward in this world below but payday will come when the pearly gates unfold. Paul had everything...and yet he said I count it nothing. No matter what I have, it could be wealth, it could be riches, it could be car

or house, anything, he said I count it as loss to gain more of Christ. Paul's sufferings are almost unbelievable, he must have had a constitution of iron, God must have used supernatural powers to keep him alive...(he reads from Romans 8 who shall separate us from the love of God?) What will separate us from the love of God? What do we hold dear that we perhaps think, this might be number one, I'm not sure about this one. If God calls to give up all to follow him then absolutely nothing should be able to separate us... If we're offended, nothing should separate us from the love of God. If we're persecuted, nothing should separate us from the love of God, if we're fed up then that shouldn't separate us. We need to be committed to Jesus Christ. Indeed the song which says I surrender all sums it up quite well where we need to be. There are many things that God would have us do in these last times but it requires commitment. Jesus Christ calls us to be committed to the cause, let nothing, absolutely nothing separate us from the love of Christ in these last times. [praise God] I want us to sing that song `I surrender all, all to thee my precious saviour, I surrender all' and if its been a long time since we've really got into God's presence and said Lord I surrender all then the alter is here. We need to commit ourselves to God. God has a special purpose for you and me, God has a special calling to you and we need to be committed to God.

The song, **I surrender all** is sung, during the process of which people come to the alter for prayer and re-commitment. The speaker makes a repeated call as they come and the w.c. continues to lead in song. The alter call continues for a few moments. After prayer and final words, the service is concluded.

Worship and Liberation: A Service Observed

Youth Night is one of the special services forming part of the regular worship activities of the NTCG which enable full representation and acknowledgement of all of the church's congregational participants. The preceding week, for example, had been Pastor Appreciation Sunday, which provided a time, not only for Pastor Thompson to have a break from preaching, but more importantly, for his value and contributions to the continued development of the church to be fully recognised by those whom he served. Moreover, this recognition and thanks was not reserved for

him exclusively, but was extended to his nuclear and extended family who also form part of the church's membership.

Youth Sunday was an opportunity for young people to take over the running of the service, both morning and evening, although this examination focuses on their evening contribution. The service has been chosen as a useful point of focus for two main reasons. The first is that young people potentially comprise the Church of tomorrow and, therefore, provide a useful insight into how the BLC is developing. The second reason is that, young people comprise 55% of the NTCG's U.K. membership and are, therefore, deserving of serious attention.

One of the most noticeable characteristics of the service was that everyone participated in it; there were no spectators. Although it was Youth Night service and people had been asked to make a special effort to attend for the evening to support the young people, this support was clearly not meant to take the form of appearance only, rather it was to extend to allowing the witness of the young people to open the hearts of the congregation to the Spirit of God. The intention being that once the Spirit 'descended' everyone would leave with a blessing and a greater awareness of God. This symbiotic relationship between congregation and leadership forms one of the key elements in African Caribbean Christian worship and testimony and the mutual expectation engendered, in itself, provided an atmosphere of liberation. The service was informal. There were no 'spotlights' on individuals as performers and everyone's contribution was to be considered significant and spiritually beneficial. From the two little girls of about eight or nine years old who came up to sing "I Just Wanna Thank You Lord," to the night's main speaker, to the woman in the congregation who shrieked "hallelujah Lord", each

contribution was to be considered a testimony and every testimony contributed to spiritual edification and should, therefore, be shared.

Another major characteristic of the evening was the spontaneity of both worship and leadership. As can be observed from Document 1, the service was to be one of worship and praise and clearly some items; some of the musical renditions, the themes of the talks etc. had been planned in advance. Yet there was the distinct impression that a great deal of the service had not been. The resulting effect, however, was not one of disorganisation but rather of informality and, once again, of overriding liberty. People were gathered together as a community of believers to allow the Spirit to lead and they needed, therefore, to put themselves in a position where they would be able to follow. Hence the worship co-ordinators encouragement; "I just want you to feel free to worship God...submitted to Him."

This element of spontaneity, for example, meant that the request for "two or three special testimonies" could comfortably be extended into a long line of special testimonies. That such freedom of expression was to be encouraged was evidenced again with the extended version of the song sung by the two little girls and other numerous choruses. That liberation in worship was to be accommodated at all costs is evident from the document.

The document also shows just how important music was to that freedom in worship. The songs and choruses were all sung from memory; they were repeated so often that a visitor such as myself, would find no problems in picking up the words of any which were unfamiliar. Not being bound to written text on a page meant that songs could be experienced as they were sung rather than simply recited. Hands, feet and bodies could be used fully in worship and it was the Spirit who decided when a song came to and end rather than the number of verses there were written down in a

hymn book. In terms of the kind of songs sung, the congregation were reminded that it was a praise and worship service. The element of praise is to be considered important because it is a method of releasing the pool of energy from God that will ensure the victory in everyday life. As the worship leader for the morning service had said: "when the praises go up, the blessings come down." Without the release of that power, then, life for these Christians would be so much more difficult, if not impossible.

Concerning the content of the songs, there were those that acknowledged the greatness of God because praise must always begin with identifying the object of praise. However since it is not always possible to recognise the object without identifying Him with one's own need, the songs also spoke about how God, the Almighty, the All powerful, actually is concerned enough to intervene positively in the lives of believers. Hence in chorus one, it is an *Almighty God* who sends His liberating Spirit for their specific use. In song two, this *Almighty God*, the beginning and the end, works miracles in their lives. In song five and six, *God the Omnipotent*, is nonetheless faithful to them and will care for their every need, every day without cease. In song nine and eleven, *God the All powerful* makes the ultimate sacrifice of death to set them free from their oppressive and destructive bondages of sin.

Acknowledgement of God's greatness and relationship to His people naturally leads on to thanksgiving for this gracious partnership - hence songs such as numbers three, four and ten. It also necessitates the responsive offering of one's own self as reflected in the final hymn; *I surrender all*. In addition to this, one can also give thanks in anticipation of the final state of liberation, to be achieved in "God's holy, White city," as is illustrated in songs number seven and eight. Ironically, this song

reveals, too, the complex meaning of syncretised liberational identity, as has been explored in chapter 5.

The musicians' participation in worship is just as important as the singers' because they help to create much of the mood and should from which the emotions soar up in thanksgiving to God[1]. This was also undoubtedly why music was used as a background to prayer and to the end alter call and why it played as significant a part in the overall service as the testimonies brought in word.

Yet another noticeable characteristic of the service was the emphasis on the 'Word of God'. Bible readings and quotations featured strongly throughout the evening and when readings were given one got the sense that both the reader and those who actively listened were very familiar with both the meaning and the wording of that which was presented.

This element of experiential association also emerges as a fundamental aspect of Black religious identity. As with the choruses and songs, the selected scriptures do not remain words on a page, rather they become life testimonies.[2] To take, for example, the reading given from Psalms 71, delivered with so much energy and emotion by one young woman. The piece speaks of the writer's apprehensions and fears in the face of calamity and persecutions and yet his unyielding trust in the will of God to deliver him and his consequent insistence to sing God's praises and to remain hopeful of that deliverance. It also expresses the confidence of the writer that those who are the cause of his distress will meet their comeuppance at the hands of a God who is concerned about his suffering. It is clear from the rest of the service as

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[1] In so doing they also continue an element of worship established in Africa and thereby reflect a significant continuity.

[2] This is why it becomes essential to evaluate the theme of sermons and the selection of scriptures, See appendix 3.

it was from talking with some of these believers, that readings such as this, take on such importance because the readers are able personally to identify their own plight with that of the writer's. They too have called out to God to deliver them from adversaries and they too know that, *"Thou which has shewed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again and shalt bring me up again form the depths of the earth."* So they are able to share the same sorrows, the same promises, the same praise.

The Bible passages selected for use in the talks given by different members of the young contributors are significant in respect of the above. Before turning to them, however, it may be useful to look again at the testimonies given because in them can be found the same ideas of triumph over personal adversity and societal pressures through obedience to, trust in and continuous praise of God. The young people who give their testimonies do not shrink away from sharing their failures, apprehensions, weaknesses and pressures with their brothers and sisters, in fact these form the essence of their testimonies; at least not the problems themselves, but the fact that, in their experiences, Jesus has never once let them down or forsaken them through all their negative experiences. This is so much the case that struggles become greater opportunities to prove the greatness of God. In this light they are convinced that *"everything He does is for a good cause*". Praise in the midst of adversity, then, is a sign that the believer has faith, not just in God's ability but most importantly in God's desire to see them through to victory.[1]

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[1] This was borne out in the way that most young people who I spoke to, whilst accepting that Black people were disadvantaged in British society, were equally convinced that because God loved them He would make them succeed in life. This often meant materially, educationally, etc., also that no force, be it racism or anything else, could hold them back when God meant for them to go forward.

There are three separate talks or exhortations given other than the testimonies during the service. All three speak in different ways of the need for greater service and commitment to God, even in the face of adversity and troubles. All three are delivered forcefully and enthusiastically by young people who, with all their strength, believe that unless people have a serious and committed relationship with a living, caring and able God, then they will stand no chance of being *truly* victorious in the troubles of life. It is important to emphasise the word truly because victory here, is not seen simply as managing somehow to struggle through earthly problems. It signifies the complete defeat of sin, which in the minds of these Christians, is ultimately responsible for the troubles of this life. It also represents the gaining of spiritual rewards; that is the peace of Christ, the manifestation of spiritual gifts and, perhaps most importantly of all, the gift of eternal life and the promise of a heavenly home which has been lovingly prepared for them by a heavenly father, free from troubles forever.

The first exhortation emphasizes that in these difficult days of recession, unemployment etc., the believers need more than ever to hold on to their faith, to encourage each other in their faith and to both remember and draw upon the resources of a God the eyes of whom *"are upon the righteous*" and whose ears *"are open unto their cry"*. It warns against the perils of them becoming cold, `like cement' and it is worthwhile to note that such failures happen when the believer stops engaging in collective worship, hence the importance of symbiotic relationship is highlighted. It occurs, too, when s/he forgets the capabilities of God; hence the significance of continuous praise. The talk then, asserts the absolute importance of *a collective responsibility in order to overcome trouble*. Each believer has a duty to *"provoke one another"*, to *"stir up someone"*, in order that they themselves might

also be kept alive. In the Christian experience of these believers, *"no man is an Island."*

The main talk of the evening continues the idea of the need for commitment; the need to hold God up as absolutely and unconditionally the most important thing in their lives and being concerned with His will to such an extent that they become crucified with Christ. This aspect of commitment is significant because with it their own life dies and they live only for and through Christ. The emphasis of Michael's exhortation, however, is not so much suffering for Christ's sake, as being prepared to do everything that needs to be done in order to ensure that one remains in the will of God. This involves going ahead and fulfilling God's will for one's life regardless of how impossible the opposition might appear. This is the essence of the Biblical texts he uses to illustrate his point; Elijah and the prophets of Baal, Gideon, Elisha, etc. As he argues: *"though the human odds may appear impossible we need to know that the heavenly odds, the Jesus odds, the Holy spirit odds are well in our favour. What I'm saying to you, there's nothing too hard for God, there is no situation that you can experience that can come up against the power of God and defeat it.."*

The altar call at the end of the service is part of the expression of an active commitment that was called for in the process of the sermon. It is as much for believers as unbelievers for it provides a space for renewal of faith and energies; for gaining strength to change theory into practice and of allowing blessings, which have come down during the service, to alter into an even more tangible force for action.

APPENDIX 5

Background Information on the Five Denominations

The Seventh Day Adventist Church - Sabbatarian Tradition

General Denominational History

- Founded originally in mid-nineteenth century America.
- Founded in Jamaica at the end of the nineteenth century under the influence of a White Jamaican, Maragrette Harrison, primarily through literature evangelism.
- Recruited from the rural poor and middle class city dwellers.
- Roswith Gerloff compares the development of the Jamaican Adventists with their British counterparts and records that in spite of the fact that both missions began at roughly the same time period, by 1976 the Jamaican Church was six times as large as the British Union Conference.[1] Ten years later Patrick Johnstone places their membership at 120,000 in comparison to a 51,000 membership for the Anglican church in Jamaica.[2]

British History and Structure

- Described as "the only functioning multi-racial community in a well established body."[3]
- Fairly racially and culturally segregated in terms of individual churches and spiritual traditions.[4]
- Church divided into five Conference areas; only two of which are led by Black pastors.[5]

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[1] Roswith Gerloff, **A Plea For Black British Theologies: the Black Church Movement in Britain in its Transatlantic, Cultural and Theological Interaction, with Special Reference to the Pentecostal Oneness (Apostolic) and Sabbatarian Movements** (PhD dissertation, University of Birmingham, 1991) pg. 289.

[2] Patrick Johnstone, **Operation World,** (STL and Wec books, 4th edition, 1986) pg. 255

[3] Gerloff in Bryman, **Religion in the Birmingham Area, Essays in the Sociology of Religion**) pg. 70

[4] Robin Theobald, *The Politicization of a Religious Movement: British Adventism under the Impact of West Indian Migration* in **British Journal of Sociology** (Vol. 32 No. 2, June 1981) pg. 206

[5] This information was provided by Pastor Anderson, then of the Handsworth Church and was correct at the time of interview. Black leadership is also underrepresented on the denomination's treasury and executive committee, which controls the Church's printing press.

-'Black churches' tend to have larger memberships than the 'White' ones and, in accordance with the financial structure of the Church, supplement the smaller White congregations.[1]

-An attempt at Black Church independence, in the form of a separate conference, was made by some members in the 1970s. This was ultimately rejected.[2]

Outreach Emphasis

-Strong focus on education and health issues - has, in Jamaica, 39 elementary schools, 4 secondary schools, 1 college, 1 hospital and 1 radio Bible school. In U.K. there are four schools and a college, two of the former are 'Black- run'.

Membership Details

- Robin Theobald observes that by the latter years of the 1970s, "nearly half of Britain's thirteen thousand adult Adventists were Black ."[3]
- Overall British members of approximately 16,000, at least 85% of whom are Black .[4]
- The Handsworth branch has 367 members.[5]
- Male to female is approximately 60:65%.
- 30% of the church are youth; under 35 years of age.
- predominant age group is 55-70 year olds, thus making the church a relatively elderly one and untypical of SDA in the West Midlands.
- leadership, in terms of pastor and 'elders' is fairly young.

Headquarters Location

- The General Conference is located in Washington, U.S.

Wesleyan Holiness Church - Holiness Tradition

General Denominational History

- Emerged out of American Methodism of the eighteenth century.
- Schism in the Church due to disagreement over slavery led to formation of Wesleyan Methodist Connection of America.

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[1] Theobald, op cit. pg. 217.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid, pg. 203.
[4] Figures supplied by Pastor Anderson, in a recorded interview, 1992.
[5] Ibid.

- Wesleyan Methodist group, the Holiness Church, was established in Jamaica following anti-slavery activity.
- Attracted people from the poorer classes in urban and rural parts of Jamaica.
- Fifty churches exist in three separate districts.
- Jamaican Church has experienced a collective social mobility in recent years through the individual economical progress of its members.

British History and Structure

- British Church is divided into two areas; north and south. Both have nine churches.
- Both have a superintendent and these are headed by a national superintendent who is directly accountable to the General Conference in America.
- They exist as missionary Churches since neither of them have the qualifying 20 churches and over a thousand members that the international body requires for full district status.

Membership Details

- Approximately 700 members.[1]
- Approximately 400 are of or nearing retirement age and a further 150 fall into the middle age bracket leaving only an approximate 150 people who fall into the younger age group.
- Handsworth church has a membership of 80 people.
- 30 can be categorised as youth from 18-30 years whilst the remainder fall over this age and are, therefore, classified as adults.
- By far the majority of members have been born in the Caribbean and most of them, about 70% are women.

Outreach Emphasis

- The Jamaican Church encourages accountability to the community through the setting up of periodic health clinics and utilising member's skills in the community.
- The British Church has continued this ethos through the establishment of local community projects; for example the elderly day care centre.

[1] Figures supplied by Rev. Williams, 1992.

Headquarters Location

- Headquarters church in Marion, Indiana.
- Rules, regulations determining Church Polity decided from this source.

First United Church of Jesus Christ Apostolic - Pentecostal Oneness Tradition

General Denominational History

- Forms part of the Oneness branch of the Pentecostal tradition of which there are several other groupings in Jamaica.
- Initiated in a revival in St. Ann in 1919.
-During its formative years, owed much to the missionary contributions of women in particular Melvina White[1], who contributed significantly to the indigenization process in Jamaica.
- Shiloh Apostolic Church of Jamaica was established at Port Maria in 1941 with Sidney A. Dunn as its general secretary.
-The Church in Jamaica has 17 other branches and an approximate membership of 3000.[2]

British History and Structure

- Started through the efforts of Bishop Dunn.
- Set up as an international Apostolic body that would retain close links with the original Jamaican organisation.
- Established in the 1950s.
- Church planting is a significant characteristic.
- From the British base they have helped to build 17 churches in Jamaica, 10 churches in Canada, 6 in the US and 1 each in Trinidad, Barbados and St. Kitts.

Membership Details

- Has 42 churches in Britain consisting of approximately 5000 members.[3]
- Five Bishops in five districts.
-Handsworth is a predominately young church with about 75% of its membership under the age of 40 years.

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[1] Gerloff, **A Plea For Black British Theology**, refers to White as "probably the most influential evangelist of the early Pentecostal Apostolic mission in Jamaica." pg. 168.
[2] This is the approximate figure given by Bishop Thompson of the Kingston First United branch, however he suspects it is much higher than this.
[3] Figures supplied in interview with Bishop Dunn, 1992.

Outreach Emphasis

- Describes itself as "fiercely independent" with an emphasis on social and economic mobilisation.[1]
- E.g. its connections with Jamaica have involved it purchasing land space to provide work and housing potential for those British migrants that may want to return home.

Headquarters Location

- Birmingham, United Kingdom.

New Testament Church of God -Pentecostal Trinitarian Tradition

General Denominational History

- Has its roots in Seymour's Azusa Street revival of 1906.
- Forms part of the Trinitarian branch of the Church which is itself divided into the two stage and three stage groups[2]
- Falls into the three stage category.
- Approximately 350 churches exist in Jamaica and these house about 30,000 members.
- The majority of these members are women; roughly 80% and most of them are over the age of 40.
- As Macrobert has observed, the spiritual expression of the Church clearly reveals its links with an African spiritual heritage. It embraces a tradition in which "healing, the transformation of society or any other major undertaking in the material world could only be successfully achieved by utilising [its] spiritual power."[3]

British History and Structure

- Was one of the earliest Black Pentecostal Churches to establish itself in Britain.
- Emerged in 1953 in Wolverhampton under the direction and ministry of Oliver Lyseight and later with the assistance of H.D. Brown and G.S. Peddie.

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[1] Bishop Thompson, from a recorded interview, Jamaica, June 1992.

[2] These terms have been defined by W. Hollenweger, **The Pentecostals** (SCM Press, 1972) pgs. 24-5.

[3] Iain Macrobert in Paul Badham (ed.) **Religion, State and Society in Modern Britain**, (Edwin Mellen Press, 1989) pg. 121.

- The Lozells church in Villa Road was purchased in 1963 and was the first building to be bought by the young organisation.
- Stress placed on the financial and administrative independence from the American Church and the fact that Britain has its own national office and executive committee.
- Nationally, the denomination is served by Overstone College in Northampton, which offers formal academic training as well as practical pastoral courses.[1]

Membership Details

- By the mid 1960s the denomination had a baptised membership of 2,500 people and a total membership; including children and adherents, of 10,500.
- In 1970 this figure had risen to 3,600 baptised members and 20,600 for total membership.[2]
- Presently serves a membership of 7,300 baptised adults and at least 20,000 adherents thereby making it Britain's largest BLC.[3]

Outreach Emphasis

- A high emphasis placed on youth training through youth departments, conventions, choirs and events.
- Saturday Schools, care for the elderly, child-care.

Headquarters Location

Tennessee, America.

Shiloh Pentecostal Fellowship (SPF) - Pentecostal, Trinitarian Tradition

General Denominational History

- Emerging from the Pentecostal Trinitarian tradition as previously described.

British History and Structure

- Initiated in Britain in the late sixties and as such it is the only one of the five denominational groups not to have organisational roots linking it directly with the Caribbean.

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[1] The building now serves as the National Headquarters.

[2] Figures provided by Clifford Hill, ***Pentecostal Growth - Result of Racialism?*** in **Race Today** (3, 1971) pg. 181-190 and Christopher Wright, *Culture Continuity and the Growth of West Indian Religion in Britain* in **Religion** (14, 1984) pgs. 337-356.

[3] Figures as cited in the Centre for Black and White Christian Partnership and Westhill RE Centre, Selly Oak Colleges, **Black Christians: Black Church Traditions in Britain**, 1995, pg. 19.

- Formed by Pastor Corbett, in 1965, who identified a common need for many Pentecostal leaders to work more closely together within a church grouping where they could be fully accepted.
- Intended to act as an association of Pentecostal congregations rather than as a formal organisation.
- First church established in Ipswich.
- Unlike most of the other pastors interviewed as part of the study, Pastor Corbett does identify the racism of particularly the White Pentecostal Churches as being a major factor in the establishment of the fellowship.
- Each church exists as an independent trust and whilst an executive team, consisting of a superintendent, secretary, treasurer and national youth leader.
- Whilst a church planting policy is pursued, the new churches are all self supporting and self run.

Membership Details

- Seven churches exist within the UK and these are situated in London, Ipswich, Leicester, Wales, Slough and Birmingham.
- Approximately 1000 baptised members exist although the number of adherents would perhaps more than double this figure.[1]
- The church in Aston has a local membership of 80 with between 80 and 100 people in attendance each Sunday.
- It maintains a preponderance of women and, especially in the Birmingham branch, of youths.
- Its youthfulness is illustrated in both its congregational and leadership make-up.

Outreach Emphasis

- Broad social needs, primarily responded to by United Evangelical Project.

Headquarters Location

- London, U.K.

[1] Figures supplied by Pastor Corbett, in interview, 1992.

Appendix 6

Transcription List And Research Aids

U.K. Interviews

No. 1 SDA, Balham

No. 2 FUCJCA, Wolverhampton/Birmingham

No. 3 Assemblies Of The First Born, Lozells

No. 4 NTCG, Handsworth

No. 5 NTCG, Handsworth

No. 6 NTCG, Handsworth

No. 7 NTCG, Handsworth

No. 8 NTCG, Mile End

No. 9 NTCG, Handsworth

No. 10 NTCG, Handsworth

No. 11 NTCG, Handsworth

No. 12 Church of Jesus Christ Apostolic, Handsworth

No. 13 WHC, Handsworth

No. 14 WHC, Handsworth

No. 15 WHC, Handsworth

No. 16 WHC, Handsworth

No. 18 Church of England, Birmingham

No. 19 SPF, Aston

No. 20 SPF, Aston

No. 21 SPF, Aston

No. 22 SPF, Aston

No. 23 SPF, Aston

No. 24 SPF, Aston

No. 25 SDA, Handsworth

No. 26 SDA, Handsworth

No. 27 SDA, Handsworth

No. 28 SDA, Handsworth

No. 29 FUCJCA, Handsworth

No. 30 FUCJCA, Handsworth

No. 31 FUCJCA, Handsworth

No. 32 FUCJCA, Handsworth

No. 33 FUCJCA, Handsworth

No. 34 Baptist, Handsworth

No. 35 Baptist, Handsworth

No. 36 Baptist, Handsworth

No. 37 Baptist, Handsworth

No. 38 BLCLC, Handsworth

No. 39 Church of God of Prophecy

No. 40 New Testament Assembly

Non U.K. Interviews

No. 17 FUCJCA, New York

JNo.[1]1 NTCG, Hanover

JNo. 2 Methodist/UTCWI, Kingston

JNo. 3 Disciples of Christ/UTCWI, Kingston

JNo. 4 Baptist/UTCWI, Kingston

JNo. 5 Methodist/UTCWI, Kingston

JNo. 6 WHC, Papine

JNo. 7 FUCJCA, Kingston

JNo. 8 Jamaican Council of Churches

JNo. 9 Bethlehem Baptist Church - Revivalist, Kingston

JNo. 10 Baptist, Kingston

JNo. 11 UTCWI

Recorded Services and Talks

NTCG *Youth Service* - 24/11/91

ACEA *Black Theology: Does It Embrace Us* - Theological Study Group - *11/91*

SDA *Worship Service - AYS* - Feb. 1992

WHC *International Women's Festival* - March 1992

SPF *Morning Service* - March 1992

ECRJ *Black Women In The Church* - 1992

Revivalist *Church Service, St Andrews, Jamaica* - 1992 Pentecostal *Church Service, Spanish Town, Jamaica* - 1992

NTCG *Children's Day Worship Service, Hanover, Jamaica* -1992

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[1] JNo. = Jamaica Number

Disciples of Christ *Worship Service, Portland, Jamaica* - 1992

WHC *Worship Service, Papine, Jamaica* - 1992

SDA *Worship Service, Kingston, Jamaica* - 1992

UTCWI *Concert* - 1992

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